Tawai: A Voice From the Forest

Bruce Parry

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Contents

Tawai is a word the nomadic hunter-gatherers of Borneo use to describe the connection they feel to their forest home. In this dreamy, philosophical and sociological look at life, Bruce Parry (of the BBC's Tribe, Amazon & Arctic) embarks on an immersive odyssey to explore the different ways that humans relate to nature and how this influences the way we create our societies.

From the forests of the Amazon and Borneo to the River Ganges and Isle of Skye, Tawai is a quest for reconnection, providing a powerful voice from the heart of the forest itself.

> The film shares the Penan and the Pirahã's ways of living, providing great inspirations and reflections on what kind of society we can create.
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> The Penan are the last resilient groups who practice a particular social organisation. They don't have a concept of material property. All that exists in nature has been created for nature to enjoy. All creatures have equal rights to nature.
>
> From their point of view, the idea of property is an ideology, which some human beings have created but is not legitimate, unacceptable. It is sacrilege to what has been created for all. The accumulation of property is seen as a waste.
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> We haven't always been competitive and aggressive. It's a very recent product of our acquisitive property-based societies, which are a product of the Neolithic, when we started to domesticate animals and crops.
>
> Our shift from a hunter-gather lifestyle to farming only started about 10,000-12,000 years. This likely precipitated a decline in social equality, as food excess was stored and created a means of accumulating wealth and power.
>
> That's where the whole question of power hierarchy got inculcated in what we think of as civilisation, but actually, it's a very young, short-lived and probably suicidal social organisation for humanity. Our enduring social form is the egalitarian one.
>
> The way we experience reality affects how we organise the world around us. Would we behave differently if we could hear what nature is saying like we all once did?
>
> We must learn how to rebalance our inner world and expand our capacity. Empathy beyond our family and friends, to all peoples, all species on the planet which supports us." - Dark Matter Labs

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Introduction

Indigenous man: Trees are like humans. If the really big trees die, so do all humans. If the forest dies, humanity dies. The forest may die. The forest says: "We are part of the same family."

Bruce: What is our relationship with the natural world? And how has this changed over time? What is the effect of the way that we see ourselves in relation to the world around us? In A decade of making documentaries for the BBC, I've been lucky enough to share some moments with peoples the world over.

To briefly taste their way of life, partake in their rituals, and witness that beneath our colourful differences, we are all alike.

The incredible ways we have found to inhabit the Earth are a testament to what we are capable of.

But as our impact on the planet intensifies, many are beginning to wonder if we need to find a different way of relating to each other and the natural world.

The insights I gained from my time with indigenous peoples has left me with a strong impression that there's much to be learned from those living lives very different to our own.

One group, the Penan people of Borneo, seem to have a relationship with each other and their environment, which struck me as unique.

Remarkably, of all the tribal peoples I've lived with, the Penan were the only ones whose way of life was uninfluenced by the dawn of agriculture, settlement, and the domestication of plants and animals for food.

One of the last hunter-gatherer groups on the planet still living a nomadic existence, flowing with the rhythms of nature.

Hunters, foragers, and nomads of the forest.

But like tribal peoples everywhere, their way of life is changing rapidly and I hear that these nomadic people are beginning for the first time ever to settle.

When I heard this, I knew the time to revisit them was now.

But getting there won't be easy, for the Malaysian government is supporting the companies ravaging their lands, and film crews are not welcome.

So I'm going to need to cross the border silently.

Border crossing

Driver: He just went in the car, then I will go out and make a signal to him. And once he respond, I'll tell you.

Bruce: And the border's just there? And I've got to cross this swamp. OK. Wow. Not doing anything by halves.

There they are. There's a torch. There! There!

Driver: You hold on.

Bruce: See you soon.
Driver: OK. Yes.
Bruce: Thank you.
Driver: OK.

Voice-over

Bruce: As our relationship with the natural world has changed, what has been lost and what gained? What can be learned from people's living lives very different to our own? And is it even possible to integrate the wisdom of small, intimate societies into our vast, complex civilizations.

The Penan have a word that describes their feeling for the forest.

It's a word that doesn't easily translate.

A relationship that's hard to describe.

They call it Tawai.

The old growth forests of the world are disappearing fast.

Forests considered by many to be essential to the health of the planet.

These trees will enter the timber trade stamped sustainable and soon enough this whole area will join the endless plantations producing palm oil.

for the chocolate bars, fast foods and shampoos of the world.

Indigenous reserves are amongst the last places where such forests still stand, protected by the tribal peoples who live there.

In a bid to stop the loggers from taking these trees, the Penan appealed to the government to protect this land as an indigenous reserve.

But Malaysian law will only consider claims that show physical proof of the land having been used and despite having lived here for thousands of years, the Penan's impact is so light that they're struggling to prove that they've ever been here at all, and can therefore claim no official right to protect this, their ancestral home and so the original inhabitants of this place, the Penan, together with the forest, face an uncertain future.

I remember last time I met the Penan, right from that very first moment of even shaking their hand, I felt something completely different about them and that feeling got greater and greater the longer I was there.

They couldn't figure out what it was, everything about.

How they live in the forest is really different to any other group that I've been with before.

They carried everything that they owned on their backs and every two or three days they would make a little platform and sleep in it.

They were nomadic. As the Penan begin to settle and adapt to a new way of life, how might this influence their relationship with the world around them? I wonder how

my friends are doing and what this time will mean to them as they take on their first ever permanent dwelling.

Reuniting with the Penan

Older Penan man: All good. Good. It's not bad, it's good.

I remember you came when we were staying downstream, where we ate wild boar, and now we are meeting each other again, which means we are in good health. Thank you for coming.

Younger Penan man: That's enough daddy, give him time to shake hands with the others.

Older Penan man: I'm telling him that we are fine, we don't want to tell him the negative things, because I am very old now, we have to talk about the good things only. We don't have to tell him about the bad things.

Speaker 6: When one make my day and now one may be jumped, jumped, jumped, jumped, jumped, jumped, jumped, jumped.

Speaker 7: Jumped, jumped, jumped, jumped, jumped.

Laminita Punito.

Bruce: These longhouses, built for them by a foreign charity, sit at the edge of their ancestral lands.

The loggers have been through once before, taking all the biggest trees, and without a miracle, are set to return.

Speaker 7: I do.

One, one tree, all this.

Wow, drinking in.

Last time I was here, we were moving from one camp to the next.

Bruce: And I said, Oh, where are we going? So, we're going over there because there's a tree fruiting.

I said, Oh, great.

Do you know that the tree is going to fruit? They said, Oh, the bird's flying, and that's what we know.

I said, Oh, great, but do you can you anticipate that the birds are going to fly at this time? You know, No, no, when the bird flies, that's when we know the tree's fruiting.

I said, Yeah, but can you anticipate that? And they go, Why would we want to anticipate it? It's a ridiculous question.

When the bird flies, we go and it really got me thinking about them and their sense of time.

It's a very different.

Bruce: Sensation being here with Arau who I've only ever known trekking around in the moment hunting whenever he felt like when he's hungry he hunted when he's thirsty they went to the river and now there's this which is a totally different way.

Speaker 7: They're terrified of letting go of their forest.

Bruce: Because that's the only security they really trust and so every day that the forest is degraded, through the loggers coming through, the pipeline going through, is another ***** out of their future for their children and their children's children and in a metaphorical way, that's really interesting for all of us in our world.

These guys are intrinsically linked with the world around them.

They understand it.

What you do here affects your future.

They have that relationship.

Everything that they have is from their environment and as soon as they step out, now they're wearing a watch.

that watch is made from oil, which is plastic, and it's to do with the pipeline, it's to do all these other things.

You know, as soon as they step into that economy and start purchasing goods that they don't know where they come from, well, then they're the same as us.

You know, the reason the wood is disappearing here is because me and my neighbor are buying hardwoods that we don't care where they come from and hence the conundrum.

Speaker 7: Don't have me to look Tawai Tana.

Don't have me to look Tawai Pagay.

Don't have me to look Tawai Tawa.

Cannot Padang Pagay.

Cannot.

Cannot.

Nah.

Nah.

Nah.

How do you hit? She'll watch your town to Saha.

Cofamila ko anahami bay anahami tasha anahami shaat ana bahami kanan hao rip aami kanan hao aami lami bahami jana kam diano rip diano.

It's a roll by e na.

I tell her to that the palo.

You must tell out.

Speaker 6: Tabao ja aden.

Pao ja aden.

The funny sort of way it.

Bruce: Was easier last time because they had to take everything.

Now they've now they've got to choose what to pack.

Welcome to my world..

Here we are, back in the forest.

What a wonderful day being back, seeing them all with their rucksacks, which are tiny compared to last time where they had these huge bags with pots and pans dangling off the sides, you know, but Here we are again.

This is village life.

This is how I remember it from before.

Everyone in their little homestead, no walls, nothing to hide.

You can just see every family completely exposed and all their ups and downs, everything shared emotionally as well as physically and this is the community.

Just...

Speaker 4: They seem to have less inner turmoil, somehow.

Bruce: You see it in how they are with each other, you see it in the peacefulness of their demeanor.

It's all shared within the community and a problem shared, there's a problem halved and in this community, it's halved and halved and halved again, and it really...

It does feel like a tranquil place.

What would it be like to live in a community such as this, without walls or separation, to have an intimate awareness of your impact on the environment? Can our complex societies learn to find a similar kind of balance before the forces of globalisation destroy these forests and these people's way of life forever?

Driver: Just watching around his senses.

He's like electric, walking around looking and listening.

everything that's going on and me, I'm just kind of trying my hardest to do the same.

But mostly I'm drifting off in my mind.

What day we're going back or what's happening this afternoon.

Other hunts that I've been on or comparisons.

Whatever, anything other than just being here.

As much as I try.

Bruce: It's so clear, as a nomadic hunter-gatherer, if you don't maintain concentration in the immediate moment and attune your senses to your surroundings, you just won't survive and it was so different when Arau and I were planting fruit trees together.

The conversation was all about the future harvest.

Agriculture just doesn't seem to require the same kind of awareness as hunting does and this makes me wonder, if for 95% of our time on the planet we existed without agriculture and settlement, to what degree might this relatively recent shift in the way that we use our minds and bodies have influenced the way we relate to the world around us? If I was to try and be aware of everything going on in a busy place like this, I think I'd go crazy.

It's natural for me to tune things out and ignore them so that I can get on with my life.

How surprising then that in a place such as this, some masters of concentration can be found.

My hope is that in the coming days I can learn how to use my mind in a different way, and through this perhaps understand more about how the Penan relate to each other and their environment.

Driver: Thank you.

Bruce: I'm the madam I have.

Speaker 8: You'll be staying with us for some time.

Bruce: I hope so.

If this is okay.

Speaker 8: We have the next bath on the 10th.

Bruce: Okay.

Speaker 8: So that will be the day of action.

Wonderful.

Bruce: This festival, known as the Kum Mela, is predicted to be the largest gathering of humans in all of recorded history.

Tens of millions of pilgrims are due to arrive at this temporary city for a ritual cleansing at a confluence of the River Ganges, known to all here as the Sacred Mother.

These Hindu ascetics or sadhus live lives of devotion and service, having renounced all worldly and materialistic pursuits to follow a more simple way of life.

They will be my teachers in the coming days as we all wait in anticipation for the bathing day.

Speaker 8: Would you want to know how we're feeling sitting here with us?

Bruce: This space that you've created here with Jagadishji is very peaceful.

Yeah, very peaceful.

Speaker 8: Mind-centering, like, you know, no unwanted thoughts.

Just sitting, you know, calm, no distractions.

Bruce: And why is it that you want to find this state of being?

Speaker 8: That's where the truth lies, like, you know, when there's no thoughts.

Because when you're thinking your thoughts are there, then you're not there, no? You're being disturbed, you're not there.

Bruce: When your voice in your head is talking, you're not...

Speaker 8: That's why they say that you have to clear the mind, no mind, no thoughts.

That's difficult.

It's being aware of your body and awareness and that turning into consciousness of what's happening in yourself.

Bruce: And when you say awareness, you're talking about awareness.

Speaker 8: The whole thing.

Even the body, mind, it all goes together, no?

Bruce: Yes.

It's not so easy to sit and be still and by trying to do so, I realise how out of control the chatter of my mind has become.

My endless thoughts of other times and places take me away from my body and senses.

and my ability to feel the subtle forces inside me and all around.

Older Penan man: The mind always runs to these worldly things.

It is very hard to catch it.

It is very difficult.

Telling is very easy.

Giving the speech is very easy.

But it is very difficult to concentrate on your mind.

That's why you have to concentrate on something.

Bruce: I've read many books on this subject and I have...

Older Penan man: Ma'am, you read, you leave all the books.

You leave all the knowledge.

First of all, you keep your pot empty.

You don't fill your pot full.

There should be some place to put the knowledge.

Your pot is already fulfilled.

Where you put the...

Happy, be happy.

Be happy, be happy.

Bruce: Thank you very much.

Speaker 1: Behind.

Older Penan man: Behind.

Om Namushwa, Om Namushwa, Om Namushwa.

Keep it inside, inside, inside, inside.

Inside, inside.

Driver: Amazing.

Thank you very much.

Speaker 8: We are truth seekers, truth is one.

It's an undercurrent everywhere, right? So we are always on that path, the truth-seeking path, right?

Bruce: And how do you know when something is the truth or maybe your own mind?

Speaker 8: Yeah, discerning.

You have to discern.

Through practice, you know, this is the path.

entity, through a long time practice, this is not the way, this is the way.

Right.

Bruce: Can you feel that inside or you...

where does...

do you know it from your mind or how...

where does it...

where does that sensation come from? Knowing.

Speaker 8: I think it's the heart...

the heart talks to you, know, from the heart, know, the truth.

Bruce: I'm no stranger to talk of the heart, but that the heart alone is the only source of truth is contrary to much of what I've learned before.

I was taught to discern truth and to understand what's real through measurement and analysis.

It's matter that matters, has substance, can be quantified, repeated and proven.

This is the story of the world that I know.

Yet there clearly are other ways of living, of discerning what's real and valuable.

How might these different ways of experiencing the world influence the way we relate to each other and everything around us? I've heard of someone, an academic and scientist, who might offer some fresh insights to these thoughts, and perhaps a new way to understand the mind.

Dr.

Ian McGilchrist's work, based on years of clinical research, is about the two sides of the brain, our different hemispheres.

Speaker 9: Bruce, you made it.

Yes, indeed.

Bruce: Yes, indeed.

Good to see you.

Come here.

Speaker 10: A lot of the human neuroscientists had stopped looking at differences between the hemispheres as a bad job because the popular culture was filled with management courses about, you know, how to increase your right brain function and there was even a Volvo add the car for your right brain.

You know, that did it.

You know, no serious neuroscientist was going to look at it after that and also they realized that all the generalizations that had been made, you know, that one had language and reason, the other had emotions.

This is completely wrong.

They both observed both.

Across the board, there isn't a single thing that we do that both hemispheres aren't involved with.

So it seemed like a dead duck.

But if only they had asked a slightly different question, not what does each hemisphere do, but how does it do it, you would find a completely different pattern.

Bruce: So does that mean that fundamentally they are actually working in a different way? Is that what's happening?

Speaker 10: What they seem to be doing is subserving 2 different kinds of attention and after all, attention is what we build the world out of.

I think one broad generalization one might make is that the left hemisphere processes serially, whereas the right hemisphere tends to parallel process.

This is sounding very computer-like, and that's as far as I wish to take any computer analogy.

But you might look at it that way.

That one is looking at one thing at a time in a sequence.

The other is able to draw on a lot of things simultaneously and therefore cohere a bigger picture.

So the left hemisphere pays a kind of focus detailed attention to the world piecemeal.

It only sees a little tiny bit at a time, and it thinks that the world is put together from this bit and that bit and the other bit, whereas the other hemisphere has a broad consensual attention.

which is taking in everything and so these two kinds of attention are going to produce completely different sorts of world.

One is going to be little bits that are put together that have no meaning in themselves because they're decontextualized.

The other is going to be seeing things as connected and as part of a whole picture and only in the context of that whole picture can you understand those parts.

So those are two completely different kinds of world.

Speaker 6: Tovo nihun kaplika tovo kay jao pun tovo tanak pun tovo bua pun be aku kari murip tovo tanak pun bari ja tinan ki eh pete kusi gad dow rai kaan pun lem tanak nahun ki pita kina jalan kimurip naman ko **** nawai mgratip omok payot kab lem pun e jalan bari tong Sawit, nanbari tong jalan lurina.

Bagi aku tau jahm rim pakulam sawit na matail aku.

Speaker 4: Pata moorip tawait bebe.

Ubajin jin chukat me.

Bebpuun me tawai tanak na tasa.

Bebpuun.

Na irada ito na lamin kakat kaan.

Na bepun kayo to bepuna ralamin.

Pun kayo luwaito nahmad dog.

Tong tana mehung baraju hit ina.

Listening to Jeffrey and Selipan describe their relationship with this forest.

Bruce: Their trust of being held as a mother does her child, the feeling of to why, and the way that they naturally include the needs of birds and animals alongside their own.

This seems very different to my life back home, where my needs and wants are so often pursued with little awareness for the needs of the natural world.

I feel a sensation in this community that is extraordinary.

It is so powerful and so deep and there's something so visceral about being here and there's something so profoundly human about being in this space with these people that cuts inside me in a way that I just can't describe.

There, their tactility is so touching.

It's really...

There's no cynicism, there's no cheap wit or anything.

It's so different to me in my life where it's all chippiness and...

You can be a little bit above the other with the comments and quotes and stuff, and here it's just solid, one loving group and I know that sounds overly romantic, and of course they have their problems, but as a visitor coming here, you're just enveloped in these big loving arms and made to feel welcome instantly.

Speaker 10: Your consciousness is synthesized out of two takes on the world.

It's done so seamlessly and so fast, this blending, or perhaps alternation between the views and the information that come from the left and the right hemisphere, that inside your consciousness, as it were, you're not aware of that happening.

But over time, one of those takes is going to tend to win out and there are a number of reasons why.

The first is that the left hemisphere's take is the one that makes you able to grasp things and manipulate them and civilizations have a habit of finding this rather addictive.

They get good at it and over time, using your Latinism makes you powerful, and you get entrenched in the sort of systematic, bureaucratic ways of looking at the world, which enable you to run a large show.

The second thing is that it makes you feel that you understand everything.

It makes you believe that you know everything and that is a fatal flaw.

It's what used to be called hubris, the belief that we understand everything.

Wise people tend to feel less certain the more they know.

Unfortunately, a lot of people feel that the more we discover through science, the more certain we can be.

Bruce: There's little doubt that I live in a society that considers itself to be above and apart from nature and everything that I see and experience around me only serves to reinforce this view.

I wonder how much this separation stems from the time when we began to domesticate the natural world and use it for our own designs.

When we began, perhaps, to think and feel in a very different way and if the way we experience reality affects how we organize the world around us, what kind of society might it be that the Penan have created? I know of a couple, Jerome and Ingrid Lewis, who have spent many years living with and studying nomadic hunter-gatherer groups and I'm hoping that they will be able to help me answer this question.

Speaker 11: The Penan are one of a very rare set of people in the world who are what we call egalitarian, immediate return hunter-gatherers and what those are the last resilient groups who practice a particular social organization, These are people

who still manifest a way of living which is at the heart of how we became human beings.

There are a whole suite of very characteristic aspects which is what you've experienced with the Penan, what is present among certain groups of African hunter-gatherers as well.

It only seems to be present in Southeast Asia still and in Africa.

All over the rest of the world, it's been undermined by the introduction of agricultural practices and so they have a whole bunch of things like sharing.

They don't have a concept of material property in the way that we do, of property.

So all that exists in nature has been created for nature to enjoy.

Speaker 12: Indeed, the accumulation of property is seen as a waste, and it's...

It's not conducive to the group.

That is to be shared and demand shared as well.

It's only what you really know, that is your intellectual property.

That is yours.

But everything else is everybody's and you can ask each other for it.

Bruce: People always say, we've always been competitive, we've always been aggressive, but this, what you're saying suggests that that's not the case.

Speaker 11: That's not true at all.

It's a very recent product of our acquisitive property-based societies, which are a product of the new.

of the moment when we started to domesticate animals, to domesticate crops, and really that's where the whole question of power, hierarchy, got inculcated in what we think of as civilization, but actually it's a very young, short-lived, and probably suicidal social organization for humanity and what really is our enduring sort of social form is the egalitarian one.

That's what really made us who we are.

Bruce: Is it innate, this egalitarianism?

Speaker 11: No, it's, I mean, it's very interesting.

It's something that is hard work.

It requires work on a whole bunch of different levels, economic, political, social, ritual and that's one of the lessons you get living in an egalitarian society, is that you need to work to this.

You must be really strong in resisting.

hierarchy, showing off, hoarding, all these things when they start to emerge and it can be undermined, actually, rather easily.

It's an extraordinary achievement of our ancestors to be able to construct a society without hierarchy.

It really is and those societies, like the Penan, are the most peaceful societies on Earth.

Speaker 7: That's beautiful.

I wonder if the feeling that I get when I'm with the Penan...

Bruce: This feeling that's so hard to describe is the sensation of being among people whose lives are not built around the usual ideas of hierarchy, ownership and competition, now found everywhere else.

Perhaps this is why it was so difficult to discern, because the Penan seemed to embody an entirely different way, where each person's identity and sense of well-being is inseparable from the rest of the group.

Driver: And the landscape that supports them.

Bruce: This is so stunning.

Speaker 6: OK.

Bruce: We'll sit together.

OK.

Yeah.

Perfect.

It's, economically viable for them to share because they can't store and that's a very rational explanation for why it's in their interest to share.

But there's something beyond that as well, I think.

is that because they're sharing, the interrelationships of the community is still very real.

Whereas when we use cash, the transaction ends.

It doesn't matter who the guy is that I buy the stuff from.

There's no relationship there.

The cash is so finite and it just, the relationship ends.

Whereas here, there's always, there's always, the relationship is never quite tied up and so Arau wants to go hunting again because he feels it's his turn and everyone wants to, you know, the interrelationships are continuous and everyone feels a need to be a part of that and it just keeps everyone together.

People want to be sharing.

They want it.

This is like a continuous bubble of...

I don't know.

The desire to keep the others happy, to keep the others nourished, to keep the others fed, and the joy that comes from that.

It's like giving is loving.

It's like it's a pleasing sensation and the whole economics is totally different.

Me giving to you in this environment is we both win.

Me giving to you in my environment economically is you win, I lose.

It's totally different.

Speaker 10: People say, What would a right hemisphere dominated society look like? And the answer to that is very balanced, because, as I say, the right hemisphere understands the need for them.

It wants balance.

So one of the differences, it wants balance.

The left hemisphere is more interested in control and competition rather than in cooperation and interestingly, the parts of the brain that help us cooperate socially, make us a social animal, they're largely underwritten by the right frontal expansion.

But the trouble is that the left hemisphere doesn't seem to be aware of the need for the right hemisphere.

It thinks I know everything.

I don't need to report back.

But there is evidence that the way the brain works best is by the whole picture being grasped.

then by bits that are of interest being focused on and dealt with in a way that is very important and helpful by the left hemisphere, things are unpacked, you know, the implicit is made explicit, things are systematized more, which is wonderful, it's necessary and then that information in turn needs to be reintegrated into the whole.

Now that's the bit of this process that we're missing.

It's like I toss you the ball, you're supposed to toss it back to me, but in fact you run away and play with it and this seems to be where we are now, that we've forgotten about reintegrating clever information we can get into an overall wisdom.

Instead we think it's got all the answers in itself, which it hasn't.

Yes.

You see, when we're using our brains at their best, we're not just taking in information passively.

We're feeling our way out into the world in order to understand it, whether it's another human being or the natural world at large.

The brain is an intrinsically empathic organ.

That's where true understanding comes from.

It comes from empathy.

Older Penan man: All of this universe belongs to God.

It is a reflection of the God.

Each and every creature in this world is God.

All yet is only one God.

One father, one mother.

Bruce: In your tradition and your belief system, you believe that everything is 1 and we are all connected and we are all one, but at the same time, Physically, it seems that we are separate.

How do you describe this unity and separation at the same time? It seems so confusing to the Western mind.

Older Penan man: Here is the sun.

Bruce: Yes.

Older Penan man: You put some pots here and put some water in the pots.

Bruce: Yes.

Older Penan man: You can see the same sun in all pots.

Sun is 1, but we are seeing so many suns in the pots like that.

So this one is reflecting, is reflecting, understand you.

Bruce: Yes.

How do you think this information will be of benefit to people, for example, in my world, who don't see the world in the same way? Is it?

Speaker 8: Yeah, they don't see in the same way because they're not looking for the truth.

or the shows and what we are looking for.

Bruce: Well, in a way, people in my world are looking for a truth, but they take things apart to try and find the kind of the building.

Speaker 8: There is some truth there too.

Bruce: Yes.

Speaker 8: But the real truth, about yourself, not material things that you make, the break, make again.

It's all play, not like toys really.

Bruce: In science, we still have no answer for consciousness.

It's so difficult to ascertain, and so it's almost like swept under the carpet.

Whereas here, it's all of your considerations are about that side of the world and that's why...

Speaker 8: Swipping under the carpet, as you said.

That's where the stuff is.

You have to remove the mouth and now concentrate on them.

What is that? What is there?

Bruce: Just...

These guys don't have anger to get rid of.

I've still got loads I want to like swipe away and like thrash the world.

But for them it's like, no.

Why kick up dust? We're all going to breathe it.

Let's just...

It's harder though.

I quite like doing that, but it just goes to show what's inside me.

For these guys, it's more...

Let's just take it easy.

Speaker 8: The way of life that we live, it's very simple.

The rules that we have, we follow that.

Bruce: And are they rules that are written down, or is everything...

Speaker 8: Nobody can tell you, nobody can say you, nobody can tell you about the whole answers which you want.

The whole answers become...

Your insights.

Yeah, the answers inside you, listening your wants, your needs, you can be more at peace with you, right? You don't have any, like, disturbances in your mind, your peace, no? Like, no wants.

The less you want, the better for you.

We're conditioned life, no? Yes.

But when you know, the knowledge comes, Then you get away from there, you get rid of what you don't really need.

Condition happens, like the way you're brought up, you go to school, what you're taught, all this conditioning, you cannot get away from it.

But then gradually you have to discern yourself what you're learning is right or not.

Question, inquiry, it's really important.

You have to inquire yourself.

So the screens, we have to lift off the screens, the foggy area, and then look through, and you see the real thing.

But over there is just one mono, no? One pure energy.

Bruce: What do you, what do you call that pure energy?

Speaker 8: Well, that's the thing, that's the light.

Bruce: That's the base, the bottom layer.

Speaker 8: We believe that's even in animals, everywhere.

That's...

Bruce: In trees and plants.

Speaker 8: In trees, plants, they have their own kind of wisdom and knowledge to the trees.

Bruce: Could there really be an innate wisdom beneath our layers of conditioning? An energy that goes beyond the material, there to be found if we look inside and question all that we've been taught and the idea that this wisdom might also live in animals, trees and plants reminds me of the animistic beliefs of some indigenous peoples, where all is alive, animated and interconnected.

I know that the changes happening to the Penan are also affecting their beliefs, and I wonder how this might influence their relationship with the natural world..

Speaker 6: ..

Older Penan man: Yeah.

Bruce: What pressures drive us to change that which we put our deepest trust in? What must we let go of and leave behind in order to fit with new circumstances? the more powerful narrative? And how does the way we perceive ourselves in relation to the world influence what we believe and how we behave? It's hard to know what the signs and omens of the Penan might have been, those things that they once could and couldn't do.

replaced by a freedom to go as they wish.

Were they superstitious beliefs emanating from a place of fear and ignorance as I was taught at school? Or A subtle reading of something else, something much more profound? There's an indigenous group, the Piraha, living deep in the Amazon, who, despite generations of outside influence, still hold on to their beliefs.

Their way of life is so focused on the immediacy of each experience that their language, apparently, is without a future or past tense.

What might this focus on the present mean in terms of how they think and feel? Might this somehow reduce their abstract thoughts of other times and places? Those thoughts which detract us from feeling more deeply into each unfolding moment? It is said that many of the Piraha commune with spirits that guide them.

A guidance which they say.

Speaker 1: Comes directly from the forest.

To home, to home, to home, to home.

I, I, I, I, I, I patch it up.

Aye, aye.

I'm just wondering when you stopped, are you thinking with words or are you just feeling with your senses? I.

Bruce: Is this guidance that the Piraha follow, similar to the innate wisdom that the Sadhus talk of, an intuitive wisdom that sits beneath our conditioned layers, found when we are present to the subtleties of the immediate moment?

Speaker 1: Hey guys..

Bruce: Like the Penan, the Pirahar exude a sense of tranquillity, a peacefulness which hints at a deep contentment, despite the many opportunities they've had to alter their way of life.

The Piraha have resisted many of the material changes that other tribal groups in the area have readily adopted.

However, As with the Penan, the forces of the outside world are increasingly putting pressure on the natural resources that they rely on and so in recent years, the Piraha have also turned to agriculture.

Speaker 1: I'll see.

I'll buy you if you want to be OK.

OK.

OK.

I'll see you if you want to be OK.

I will buy it.

Yeah.

I'll see.

My girl, if we to pay my mother, you go to pay, I'll pay, I will get, I put to pay, I will get.

I like it.

Bruce: What would it be like to hear the voices of nature as perhaps we all once did? Would we reflect differently on how we behave? And what can we do to face the challenges and distractions that come between us and our inner guidance? As societies have become more complex, as we have separated ourselves from the natural world and turned our attention away from the here and now towards more abstract times and places, as we have built our walls and moved towards more individualized ideas of self.

Might techniques such as meditation have been devised to rebalance the body and the mind, allowing a reconnection with the wisdom all around?

Speaker 10: I would see religious practices as ways we have developed to put ourselves back in touch with what it is the right hemisphere knows about this world, a deep vision that the left hemisphere is constantly disengaging us from.

Things like music, poetry, and ritual engage us somewhere beyond the rationalizations that we put on very much at a top level on the surface of life, which is being present, stilling that internal stream of chatter and stopping making judgments, reengages what I would call the consciousness of the right hemisphere.

Because if the right hemisphere is more in touch as it is, actually, with everything as it newly comes to us, the freshness of experience.

Bruce: Through the senses, the information we're receiving.

Speaker 10: At the moment when we receive it, and it's new to us, before we've conceptualized it, is more present to the right hemisphere than it is to the left.

That's what I'm saying.

Now, if that is the case, the thing that is presencing, or coming into presence for us, that is present literally before we've done much with it, is more what the right hemisphere sees.

Now, if that is the case, you would expect meditation and you would expect mindfulness, which is entirely the process of emptying your mind of chatter, of judgment, and being in the moment without deciding, oh, it's one of those and I wish it would go away, or just accepting everything that is and being aware of yourself, embodied, physically, here, now, in this moment of time.

That should be a right hemisphere function.

It's the right hemisphere that has the richest and most profuse connections with the body, both giving messages and receiving them, including those that we now know really do come from the heart.

Bruce: After many days of meditating, the time has come for us all to join the procession to the ritual bathing in the Mother Ganges.

The intensity of this gathering is overwhelming, similar to the feelings I've had in other large crowds.

The growing excitement, focus, and shared intention.

Only here it feels so much more.

When I went out into the crowd, it allowed me suddenly to see myself very differently.

Suddenly I felt it for the first time, where I actually saw myself as the same as everybody.

Suddenly, the person next to me was me, and it was a we, not a him and I, for the first time and feeling something inside me that everything finally made sense.

I felt calm and loving and immense empathy for everything that was going on.

Driver: Because it was me and it was me and it was me and it was me.

Bruce: But not only the people, but also the river, the clouds and everything, all of that.

Speaker 9: Well, if I'm right to believe that the left hemisphere is the dominant, if you like, mode of thinking and taking in and understanding the world these days.

It would be an inanimate world.

It de-animates because its interest is in things that can be put together from bits.

I mean, there's an obvious sense in which it's money for old rope to say, obviously rocks are not conscious.

You know, the difficult one is saying, it's coming to the conclusion that they could be, and not being, as far as one can Tell, insane.

Why would one think that?

Bruce: Well, the earliest way of thinking was that.

The 1st way that we...

I mean, I grew up at school and when I learned about animism, we saw that as a backward, stupid way of thinking the world, and perhaps there is something more in it.

Speaker 9: That would follow a pattern that's happened with many things, where we sort of threw it out and are now beginning surreptitious to let it back in again, because actually there might be some truth in it and I think that's one of those things that you can't sort of determine by any kind of an experiment.

Bruce: Other than your own.

Speaker 9: Other than your own and it's very easy to say, and very obvious point really, to say, well, of course it's...

It's be as conscious because you are conscious and you have feelings about it and you project them on it.

I mean, that's the conventional explanation.

Speaker 10: It seems to me that if there's anything that we have to try and reconcile, it's that there is consciousness and there is matter, and it's not going to be easy reconciling them and being easy with holding things that are, you know, hard to reconcile, but holding them both and not giving them up may be one strand.

in progress towards the wisdom.

People talk about the problem of consciousness and I say, Well, what about the problem of matter? Consciousness is something we all, at least, have experience of.

We're inside of it and so forth.

But what is matter? It may be that consciousness has phases.

For example, water is in the solid phase when it's ice, in the liquid phase when it's running water, and in the gaseous phase when it's water vapor.

It's still water.

But the idea that the whole universe is a conscious being that we respond to, and it responds to us, may have a deep meaning.

Bruce: The idea that we are all somehow connected, that everything is alive and responsive, that I am both separate while also an intrinsic part of the whole, offers me a profound new way to place myself in the world.

A way that allows me to see myself in a much broader context, to reevaluate where I find meaning in life and who and what to prioritize.

The way I live my life, the type of society that I belong to, and the way that I choose to perceive the world.

makes it easy for me to ignore the true impact of my actions.

But if everything is connected, all that I do must have an effect somewhere else and I'm painfully aware that my just being here is adding to the Penan's problems.

It would be so easy to blame the Malaysian government for the difficulties that the Penan face, to point the finger at the corporations for what is happening here.

But this would only allow me to continue avoiding my own part in all of this.

Speaker 6: Pipeline.

Bruce: If we truly care for our children, and their children too, then we must acknowledge the destructive effect of our way of life on the world.

We need to look at ourselves and take responsibility for all our actions, no matter how small.

To do this, we must learn how to rebalance our inner world, and expand our capacity for empathy beyond our family and friends, to all peoples, all species, and the planet which supports us.

Feeling the pain we are causing others won't be easy, but it's this very feeling which can be the driving force for change.

A way of coming together beyond our borders and beliefs, in the knowledge that what we do to each other To nature, we ultimately do to ourselves.

Extra Featurettes

Egalitarianism with the Mbendjele of the Congo

If the film Tawai invites us to look at ourselves and take responsibility for our behaviour, the featurette, *Tawai III - Mbendjele*, is a call to action.

The Mbendjele people are from the Congo, and like the Penan, they too are egalitarian immediate-return nomadic hunter gatherers. Jerome Lewis tells us that living in an egalitarian society requires "work on a bunch of levels: political, social and economic", and our visit to the Mbendjele allows us to observe this constant group effort, working to maintain balance.

Ingrid tells us that they primarily do this through massana, a form of play, dance and song, and sure enough we see the women, young and old, playfully teasing the men. This is a powerful scene to watch, and even more so to experience first hand. This teasing is a formal way of publicly addressing antisocial behaviour within the group. Men who have been aggressive, disrespectful or even lazy lovers are playfully, humorously, but assertively, held to account by the women in the communal space.

What is fascinating about this ritual is the way it reveals how the women challenge the behaviour of the men. Rather than entering into a combative space, they embody their own quality of collective power, expressed through potent laughter, song and sexuality. But the women choose not to hold centre stage for too long, as this is an egalitarian society, and not a hierarchical matriarchy. They believe that to hold the power for too long could lead to resentment, so they willingly allow space for the men to have their turn, through their ritual called Ejengi.

The Mbendjele men tell us that Ejengi takes us back to the "roots of life", to "the beginning of the world". Jerome interprets this ritual to be in accordance with theories of how humanity overcame its hierarchical primate heritage and instituted a trust-based, egalitarian society in its place. A setting that enabled language and culture to evolve. During the ritual reenactment, through song and dance, Ejengi seems to symbolise the alpha male, whose reproductive dominance our female ancestors rejected, simultaneously inviting the other men to join them. This invitation by the women, the Mbendjele say, established society as they live it today. Men and women continue to work together to banish the tendencies of the hoarding, competitive, aggressive male spirit so that all can live together as equals. If this is the case, this ritual echoes up through the ages to remind us of the most incredible achievement of human history -

when competitive, hierarchical groups dominated by aggressive males were successfully replaced by societies of equals.

There is more richness and complexity in these ideas than any I have encountered before, and expressing them well is far from easy. Beliefs around sexual identity and the differences, qualities and roles of sex and gender are evolving, and it is certainly not for me to say what, if any, the roles of men and women or the qualities of the masculine or feminine might or should ever be. But having seen the way the women of the Mbendjele powerfully hold themselves at the centre of their society - together, in solidarity - affirming their voice within the community, I felt that I was witnessing something very important, that needed to be shared. For me, sitting there, experiencing the potent strength and freedom of those women, asserting themselves as they wished to, in their own way, I was blown away - and I discovered a feeling which continues to grow today... hope.

Bruce Parry

`https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SnI0PKXqhc`

Jerome: By not wanting much, you can quickly achieve affluence.

If you have unending wants, then you will have great difficulty ever achieving affluence and so hunter-gatherers feel contented with much less.

than we do, because those are things which are readily available to every individual in the society.

It's food, it's companionship, it's song, it's these basic things which human beings need to feel fulfilled, to feel happy.

Ingrid: And if feeling good could be achieved through a different way of being in the world, through really deriving joy by Seeing someone else being happy too, and not just you yourself, but actually wanting to create the happiness that you feel in everybody, wouldn't it be so much more desirable?

Bruce: Of course, people would say that within our own small groups, we are doing that still.

I am happy because my best friend is happy.

I am happy because my girlfriend's happy.

It just doesn't seem to extend beyond a very small group.

But what you're suggesting is that this is actually a universal thing.

that can happen in a much wider society.

Jerome: Well, it won't happen just effortlessly.

It will only happen through work and effort and that's one of the lessons you get living in an egalitarian society, is that you need to work to this.

You must be really strong in resisting hierarchy, showing off, hoarding, all these things when they start to emerge.

Bruce: So how do they manage to maintain this balance so effectively?

Ingrid: I think it's mainly through women.

Women really give that balance as the bringers of life.

Bruce: But you're not saying the women are in charge, they're just...

Ingrid: Oh, no.

The Benjele women that we live with, in a way, periodically, they assume power and they relinquish power.

Bruce: Okay.

Ingrid: In order to put everybody in their place so that there is proper sharing and proper respect for each gender's contribution to life.

They do that by an activity they call masana, that is play, playful play, singing and dancing.

Because when you hear music, you become happy, you become softer, you become more willing to share, to be generous, to be kind.

It enchants people to bring out the best in them, to celebrate that oneness.

What do you mean by that? this is the difficult thing to describe.

Jerome: It's the business of Masana is to turn a group of individuals into a cohesive group of experience, of consciousness that expands beyond the individual and it's difficult to describe unless you actually participate in these sorts of things.

Ingrid: And it's done also to entice people back into a better kind of behaviour.

It's done very humorously.

It's not, you can't really go and say, oh, don't do this, do this.

It's done with so much humour to show people it's actually rubbish to behave like that.

It's silly, it's not necessary.

Yeah, They have something that we all long for.

We really all still, I think this is why you are here as well.

You're looking for something and it's something so sweet.

It makes you feel so sweet that you feel you found something of that, we have lost.

Jerome: And the drama of everyday life here is just so exciting.

I mean, you see life, you see death.

Someone dies, it's there in front of everybody.

Someone's suffering and really sick, it's there in front of everybody.

It's not put away, compartmentalized as we do in our society.

Ingrid: And you're never alone.

It is that, you are carried by the community.

No one, if you are sad, Even if one member of the group is sad, immediately something will be done, because they know if even one goes down the drain, the whole group will go down the drain.

That sense of community, of being carried, however you feel, at any stage, that I think is phenomenal.

Jerome: It's a way of losing yourself, especially if you come from the West.

We're so focused on the importance of me, of my individualism, my career, my this, and my achievements, my.. and then what happens here is that suddenly all that my stuff, give it a break, and then just join in this group and they have verbs like mix your bodies up, mix up your bodies and when you do these rituals, you don't sit, separate, you mix up your bodies, you lay bits of you over each other, you hold each other and as you start holding each other and then you start singing these overlapping melodies together, where you're singing one part, I'm singing another part, Ingrid's singing another part.

Suddenly, that minus is lost in this us-ness, and in that us-ness, it extends to the forest, and you get this big us-ness, which is not divided anymore, but to just start to connect into that multitude.

> Women singing: ...making love, making love, making love... How is the penis? Is it strong? No it's not — it's useless! Making love, making love, making love...
>
> Group of men being interviewed: When the women dance, it makes us men happy. When people sing and dance, it brings joy to the world. We don't feel any anger about this. It makes everyone happy.
>
> **Women singing:** The owner... wibbly wobbly, wibbly wobbly goes the owner, goes the owner. Like the millipede stumble goes the owner, goes the owner...
>
> **Bruce:** I feel it inside as a man. It's powerful coming from the women.
>
> **Group of men being interviewed:** They are celebrating their thing. They are telling us how good we look as it swings from side to side.
>
> **Women singing:** Look at his penis! He trembles, why? Making love, making love, making love...
>
> **Group of men being interviewed:** When the women sing they insult us men a lot. We, the men, do not like that at all. But that is the way they do it, so we have to let it happen.
>
> That's the world of Masana, we just accept it, that is the way the ritual goes, that's how Masana is!
>
> **Bruce:** And is there a male response to this?
>
> **Group of men being interviewed:** Once the women have don Ngoku, it is time for the mens dance. Edjengi. We won't refuse them or stop them when they dance like this. But when it's time for Edjengi, then we take

over. It's Edjengi. Not us! When the spirit of Edjengi dances, we are going to the roots of our life, to the beginning of the world.

Bruce: The Benjeli women say that Ejengi represents the spirit by which they became pregnant before the time when they invited the men to join the group.

All the spirits used to belong to the women in ancient times.

Beponga said that the women should give this very strong spirit, Edjengi, to the men so that the men can keep it as their own.

The women said to the men: "Take these spirits and keep them." Because the spirits were too painful for the women.

That is why they gave them to the men.

The women refused to keep them.

Once the men's spirit is awake, the women sing to him.

It is not like the women would refuse to sing for the men's spirit.

There are both men and women in the world.

Right? (laughs)

Jerome wonders if this is a reenactment of the moment when the women rejected the alpha male and invited the other men to join with them, the beginnings of human society.

The men need to keep him under control and away from the women so that all can live together.

No chiefs, no shaman or leaders of any kind, but men and women playfully but seriously working away to maintain balance and respect for all.

This extraordinary way of being, I'm told, is not just limited to small isolated groups, but extends out and overlaps with hundreds of thousands of people and communities across vast areas, and very possibly our shared human ancestry.

We people all live in the forest, and we share it with everyone else.

So we must share, everyone, so that we can continue to live together.

If you find something to eat, everyone needs to take advantage of it.

So when you come back with your food, you give a piece to everyone, so that everyone can be delighted with you and eat.

It's not like you can eat a lot on your own and then show off when you become stronger. No. It's not like that. Everyone needs to eat.

If you see that your family is lacking clothes, you must give them all something to wear. If you see that this woman doesn't have a cooking pot, you

must give her yours saying: “Take this cooking pot and cook your food with it.”

It’s all about love. We, the Baka people, are like one big family. We love each other.

That’s what love is. It’s joy for all. When you share and everyone is doing well, it makes you happy.

Every member of this community takes their part in maintaining the balance.

If one person tries to show off or get out of hand, like a man claiming to be a better hunter, then the other men would simply remove his weapon, and the women refuse to cook his meat.

The power of these women is really evident, accentuated by their being together, their solidarity in the public space.

Ayahuasca

A little film about AYAHUASCA

In the main feature Tawai, Bruce Parry takes us on a journey to discover why we have created the types of societies that we live in today.

During his journey we learn that practices such as meditation may have been created over time to bring humankind back to a way of being that reflected our more connected and empathic hunter-gatherer origins.

In this additional featurette, Bruce Invites his brother Duncan to share with him another tool or practice that has a similar outcome - a practice which he first discovered while making documentaries with the BBC - the Amazonian medicinal brew, ayahuasca.

But as we shall see, in order to begin the process of self-reflection and healing that Bruce believes is so necessary in the world today, it is also important to know that the journey, while ultimately beneficial, is seldom an easy one.

For more information on ayahuasca and its use please check out the website, https://www.tawai.earth/tawai-ii-ayahuasca

and http://www.iceers.org/interested-taking-ayahuasca.php?lang=en#.WzE5OxIzbOR

”In the course of our life
and in everything that we do
all of our purposes
its convenient in some instances to stop a moment and look at ourselves
in relation to our environment
to feel where the heart is,
the feeling,
the fundamental purpose that brings us to do things

at that point, we can cleanse
and correct and reorientate where we are going
because we are children of the same mother,
the same earth
the same life."

Kajuyali Tsamani, Nabi Nuhue, Pasto, Colombia
Featuring Dr. Rosa Giove, Centro Takiwasi, Peru
Music by Nick Barber, Song by RafaelleMusic
Filmed by Mark Ellam, Sound by Pablo Villegas
Edited by Veronique Cabois
Participating: Mama Luciano & Saka Rosa Mamatakan, Duncan Parry, Rafael Mazarrasa, Rory Spowers, Madeline Dempsey, Richard Decaillet, Diana Rico, George Barker, Olivia Percival, Dominic Grant, Jerónimo Mazarrasa, Sebastien La Fuente, Natalia de los Ríos, Sofia Alegria, Mara Pax, Martin, Adriana Jaba Saka.
Topics: Psychedelia, Shamanism, Kogi, Shaman, Healing, Plant Medicine, Doctor Rosa Giove, Kajuyali Tsamani, Bruce Parry, Tawai, Ayahuasca

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`https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXkqrVuEl4w`

Bruce: For sure, these ceremonies can temporarily alter the way the world is perceived.

But are these just altered states and dreams? Or do they allow an access to something more profound? To the tribal people who know them, they are medicines, bringers of great insight.

I feel a desire to share such an experience with someone else, to see what they can find and my brother Duncan, who has never done anything like this before, has agreed to join me.

Hello, nice to see you. Are you well? Looking really well. Very well indeed.

These medicinal plants can be overwhelming, and the importance of finding the right setting and guidance is vital.

So, after a long search and recommendations from people I trust, I have found a place in Colombia run by an ayahuasca practitioner of many years' training and a visiting doctor who specializes in using plant medicines to treat addictions.

Practicioner: We are going to start a conversation about the sacred little plant ayahuasca.

I was a conversation in relation to the Ayahuasca. [...]

Doctor: Cada cultura Occidental en Europea.

Tinesos propios metos de curar ses propia medicina traditional.

I must speak to more important in the medicina traditional que la spiritualidad que noe reconocida talqual poro pla medicina mas biologista por de ciro del umo in la medida que noe reconosa que una spiritualidad umundo invisible algo que vamas ayader serumano mas resendente is official que puedan articulas Conosimientos.

No puedesi mosar cosas muy terribles de nosotros, nosotros, eroris, cosas feas que mo secho.

Prosimple lo aponerosa, carinosa, conosotros mismos.

Practicioner: Quiero con todlomas carinoso de mi corazon de se arles que tingamos una noche una ceremonia llena de amor de felicidad un urnos esta sagrada plantita is.

Muy importante con carinho con sinceridad.

Bruce: Every time I've partaken in something like this, it's been a completely different experience.

There is no knowing what the night might bring.

There can be a lot of fear, fear of letting go, of trusting, of believing, of allowing the medicine to do its work, the questioning mind so often getting in the way.

But, invited or not, the vitality of these plants are strong.

A kind of physical, emotional and mental cleansing that can feel like the guidance of nature herself washing through the body, leaving insights and images, often painful, but somehow always gratefully received and with these insights, it's possible to see where life is out of balance, the effects of decisions on others, the way life is led and from there, a new path can unfold, if the willingness and courage can be found.

It's far from easy and far from complete, but there is something very healing about the humility and tenderness of being shown such difficult truths.

Bruce's brother: I had one revelation which was just we are completely completely one.

Everything was like, that's so strong.

We are all just made-up, so in fact, I welcomed every possible insect, whatever, to crawl all over me because we were at one with it.

That sounds very a good representation of what's happening, completely amazing because I didn't have any fear about lots of things because I realised that we...

Sounds funny now, relating it of course, but it was so clear and that was just going to tease through every thought I had, every thought I had about whatever relationship or problem or good things. Immense.

Bruce: Have you ever had that sensation of oneness before?

Bruce's brother: Absolutely never.

Bruce: How did you feel when that sort of realisation came to you?

Bruce's brother: Absolutely staggering. In an amazing way. Yeah, completely mind-blowing.

Speaker 6: Sophia, can I ask you one more thing?

Speaker 7: Sure.

Speaker 6: So I want to say... looking into the dark paths.

Speaker 7: Mirando, Asia, El Lado.

Speaker 5: It has been the night of the worst nightmare of my life.

I'm sorry to make this statement, but I'm I don't want to go too far away from the truth.

Practicioner: En el tras curso de nostra vida y ene ya todlo que semos todos nos tras propositos es conveniente en certos momentos parar momentito mirarnos en relaciona nostro entorno.

Centir quales el corazon, quales el sentimiento, quales el proposito fundamental que nos con voca realizar estos actos.

Ine se momento podemos limpiar, correhir, y reorientar, haciadon de vamos.

Perquetodoso mu sijos estamisma madre, estamisma tierra.

Outtakes

Early Quest Intro

An early introduction to the film Tawai, when the Mbendjele tribe were still a part of the film

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`https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z4QSbXuN7z8`

The mother of all women, the elder one, was called Beponga.

Beponga took her wisdom and gave it to the men: ”See this is my women’s wisdom. You keep these spirits well.”

”We will give you men these spirits, but you have to take very good care of them.”

When you get something, you will share with everyone.

Your wisdom, is acting according to what you see, and what your heart tells you.

Your heart tells you: ”Share these things with people.”

Full Interviews

Some clips from these interviews were used in the film, but most went unused.

Jerome & Ingrid Lewis

Part I

https://vimeo.com/260344693

Jerome: The Penan are one of a very rare set of people in the world who are what we call egalitarian, immediate return hunter-gatherers and what those are, the last resilient groups who practice a particular social organization which is so resilient that it probably goes back to a period prior to the emergence of Homo sapiens, or at least key aspects of it.

So these are people who still manifest a way of living which is at the heart of how we became human beings.

So in primate societies, we are primates, of course. You have hierarchical dominant submission relationships as the dominant political force.

So you're constantly distrustful of other conspecifics, of other creatures in your group, because at any point they might try and somehow undermine you and get dominance over you and this leads to no trust and without trust you can't have things like language, pedagogy, teaching.

It doesn't work if you don't trust each other.

The care that we show for each other is something that doesn't exist in a society where you don't trust, so cooperation can't start happening.

There are a whole suite of very characteristic aspects of human beings which emerge not from our primate heritage, but from a heritage which was, in a sense, a revolution, which overthrew those primate hierarchies and installed something else, which is what you've experienced with the Penan, what is present among certain groups of African hunter-gatherers as well.

It only seems to be present in Southeast Asia still and in Africa.

All over the rest of the world, it's been undermined by the Neolithic Revolution.

Bruce: By the Neolithic Revolution, what's that?

Jerome: The introduction of agricultural practices, domestication of animals, so moving away from being a hunter-gatherer, who's in a sort of interchange with the environment, exchanging substances.

There's a flow of life going on.

Killing is not, in their conception, is not destroying.

It's creating a flow.

Life depends on the death and birth, the constant cycling of creatures and so hunting is an aspect of cycling.

between life forms and if life is to exist, it has to keep moving, it has to keep flowing, it has to keep going.

Bruce: Wow.

Jerome: And so they have a whole bunch of things like sharing.

They don't have a concept of material property in the way that we do, of property.

So all that exists in nature has been created for nature to enjoy and there's no question that a duck or a goose or a human being has any more right to that nature.

All creatures have equal rights to nature and so the idea of property, from their point of view, is an ideology which some human beings have created, but is not legitimate.

It is unacceptable.

It is, in a sense, a sort of sacrilege to what has been created for all creatures to share.

Ingrid: Indeed, the accumulation of property is seen as a waste, and it's not conducive to the group.

That is to be shared, and demand shared as well.

It's only what you really know, that is your intellectual property.

That is yours.

But everything else is everybody's, and you can ask each other for it.

Bruce: So, with the Penan, for example, where I've just been, the notion that they are...

sharing everything, which is so telling with them, which seemed so different to everywhere else I've been.

You're saying it really is.

It's like there's fundamental differences between that type of group and all the other groups.

Jerome: All the other, yeah.

So what we often mistakenly think of as social evolution, the idea that somehow the technologically sophisticated, materially whatever, developed societies are somehow more evolved than these hunter-gatherers is in fact a myth.

It's wrong.

We are regressing, if anything, because we're returning into these dominating hierarchical...

relationships with each other, and that's leading to the installation of fear and mistrust as the dominant modes of human interaction.

You can see it in airports across the world now, the way those small children are suspected of carrying bombs and put through scanners and tested, even though they're

very innocent of this whole fear culture that we've now created and it's very worrying because fear leads to violence.

It's a really very strong relationship.

As soon as you start to question other people, not trust them, then you start to be prepared to do things to them which you wouldn't accept in other situations.

Bruce: But I always thought it was kind of just romantic, Jerome and Ingrid, to sort of...

to overemphasize these sort of...

anything about any of these groups, but you're saying this sort of, this equality that they have is a very real thing.

It's like that's...

Jerome: Yeah, it's a...

I mean, we call it egalitarianism rather than equality, because there's a false idea among Westerners that equality is sameness.

But none of these societies say people are the same.

Bruce: Right.

Jerome: Rather, they recognize differences, but they do not attribute higher value or lower value to those differences.

So whereas we're constantly categorizing things as better or worse, more desirable, less desirable, they're just saying no.

There are many different types of people and that's what makes society the thing it is, what's, you know, we are special because we have lots of diversity and we should celebrate that rather than think that it's something that needs to be levelled off and flattened out and so it's a different sort.

So it's an egalitarianism which respects and celebrates difference, but doesn't attribute different values.

Part II

`https://vimeo.com/260336731`

Bruce: The experience I had with the Penan was it just felt like there was just something different about how they are relating to each other.

I mean, everything you're saying that totally answers my question, but do you get the same feeling with the groups you go to? It just feels like a sea change of... being somehow.

It's like, isn't it? It's like something like you can't, I couldn't put my finger on it.

There's something totally different about just being here and so what sort of groups do you know? Where do you spend your time?

Ingrid: Well, we lived with Mbenjele in the Northern Republic of Congo, and they are hunting and gathering people and it's true, it's very difficult to try to put into words what they make you feel.

The Benjele, they have a very, very deep respect for life and all living things.

So whether that is a human being, a tree, an animal, they celebrate and respect that life that lifts itself through all different types of consciousness and crucially, what they understand is that only by By being together as a group, by functioning together as a group, can you evolve? The Benjeli women, for instance, they say that it is them who created society and they do that through a mechanism they call Masana.

Bruce: Masana.

Ingrid: Masana.

Masana is a word that describes play, from children's play to adult ritual, to enactments and Masana is there to enchant people.

It enchants people to bring out the best in them, to celebrate that oneness.

Bruce: What do you mean by that?

Ingrid: See, this is the difficult thing to describe.

Jerome: The business of Masana is to turn a group of individuals into a cohesive group of...

of experience, of consciousness that expands beyond the individual and it's difficult to describe unless you actually participate in these sorts of things and there's a certain moment when you perform a sound and you sing polyphonically.

So you sing part of the melody, she sings another part, I sing another part, and they're all different melodies and it's only by each of us singing those different melodies that this other melody appears on top and this This is, I mean, it's a musical process, right? And if you, if we do it, then.

Bruce: That starts, and you can literally hear another audible...

Jerome: Yes, if you're listening from a distance, you will hear a different song to the songs of each individual.

Ingrid: But it is crucially what it does to you when you participate in that type of singing.

Because first of all, you mix your bodies.

That means that first of all, people touch.

Bruce: Right.

Ingrid: So women come together as a group.

They first touch in body, physically.

But then by unifying their voices in this type, they...

They bring out a different level of energy because by unifying you actually become one.

It's difficult to say because when it happens to you, suddenly lose, when you really enter that state that they, in a way, press upon you.

It's like really enchanting you.

lose that sense of I-ness.

I-ness, like I, like knowing that you are here, and you really dissolve into group consciousness, into us-ness, where it's just joyous, and this is what life should really be.

That's how they explain it.

Life is there, it's joyous, it's unbelievably intelligent.

The fact that, you know, you walk, you talk, you breathe, you can...

communicate with each other is amazing, the fact of life and that is what they celebrate through it, regularly, all of the time, especially during times of celebration, during times of hardship, knowing that even if one member of the group suffers is unwell.

that sort of sense of well-being, even if one person suffers, then that can affect the entire group.

So you will have to do masana to pick and lift that people up into the group consciousness and this is something absolutely marvellous.

We seem to have forgotten here.

We have all sorts of definitions of health, you know, World Health Organization, for instance, says it is health is physical, social, mental, and social well-being.

It's exactly that, social well-being.

When we all really help each other and function as a group, then life is well.

Bruce Hood

Part I: Beliefs & Rational Explanations

`https://vimeo.com/253779680`

Parry: Let me start. I used to go and live with indigenous peoples, as and I've seen many things happen.

I've had many experiences myself, but I maintain an incredibly rational perspective all the way through that. I've seen people talking in tongues, I've seen shamans talking to the spirit world, sorry, and I've even had my own very strong medicinal rituals.

I'm using shamanic plants, often hallucinogenic plants that have given me extraordinary sensations and yet I've always considered that to be just me exploring my own subconscious or just hallucinations and so I've managed to put them in a box, stick them to one side, and kind of forget about them and get on with my normal rational way of looking at the world.

But something happened to me. A group of people who I'm going to visit very soon in Colombia, called the Cogi people, asked of me to perhaps start looking at the world in a very different way, to allow a possibility in that the world was a very different place and that there was a stronger connection between us and that we are also sort of able to co-create and interplay with each other in a more mental realm and at first, of course, I just thought, No, that makes no sense.

It doesn't fit in with my worldview.

It doesn't fit in with any of how I see the world.

But everything changed for me.

Suddenly I saw meaning in everything.

Suddenly there was serendipity, whereas previous it was random coincidence and it felt beautiful and then I would rationalize it and step to the side.

The magic would disappear and I would see I would then sort of assess whether or not this was just coincidence and I was applying meaning or whether perhaps there was something more to it and all I can say to you, Bruce, at this stage is that after a year and a half of doing that, I came to a place where I genuinely, genuinely thought that there was something much more profound going on than me just applying meaning to random occurrences.

There I am.

I'm in the balance.

I've just met a whole bunch of credible scientists that have given me reason to think that there might be something in it.

Bruce Hood: Okay.

Parry: And now here I am with you.

Hood: So you're feeling connected.

Yes.

Well, I think that's a really fundamental need of humans, is to have connections with others.

We spend our time, most of us spend our time with others, and we get a lot out of it.

every weekend, thousands of people congregate in stadiums and enjoy a collective experience and there's an emergent property.

There's something tangible about people coming together.

But of course, they say that's just football fans, or it could be a rock concert, or it could be a, I don't know, a gathering in the park.

But when people get together, something seems to happen.

Now, I don't think there's any real energy as such.

I don't believe there's some tangible, measurable force.

But there's certainly a change in behavior and I don't think there's any question about that and that's because we're a social animal.

We enjoy other people.

We see ourselves with other people.

We define ourselves with the people we hang out with.

So I think that's a very rational way of thinking about it.

Of course, it makes more sense, or it seems more intuitive, to then posit maybe some energy, maybe something in the supernatural, because it just feels so different to our normal lives.

But I don't think we need to actually do that.

I mean, I think we can accept that it's just part of our nature to hang out in groups and have that emotional experience that's brought by the masses.

Parry: When I started exploring these things, it felt deeper.

It wasn't just, hey, guess what, it makes perfect sense that I'm happy that I got a friend.

You know, maybe I'll have an endorphin release because of this or this, and you know, and having friends is good for me.

It felt much stronger.

It felt like actually that my thoughts were were bringing about something.

The way I was perceiving reality was also shifting in response to how I was wanting reality to be.

Hood: Well, your emotions are always working with your thought processes all the time.

You just know that when you're happy, you think in a different way than when you're sad.

When you're sad, you become preoccupied, very negative in your thinking.

So, you know, you can have an uplifting experience simply by emotions.

You don't need to advocate any additional force or energy or any supernatural thing.

I mean, I would say, if you really believe there's something in addition, I mean, what would we be measuring? What would be the evidence? What would be, I suppose, the credible kind of thing that we could measure with a ruler or measure scientifically? I'm not sure there is anything we can, but I'd certainly accept that, you know, emotions are a very powerful motivator.

and our thought processes are definitely shaped by emotions.

I mean, just simply knowing something is true, you've got to have a sense of feeling it's correct.

You can think, we're not computers, which are devoid of feelings.

We are thinking, feeling machines in many ways and so we need that feeling often to kind of guide our reasoning and so I think what I would argue is that you definitely have probably seen or experienced something which has changed your worldview.

You're thinking about things differently.

But you don't need to advocate anything in addition is what I'm suggesting.

Parry: I don't need to, but when I do, it feels even better.

It's like an accumulative thing and also I guess that from a, you know, because I still have a rational mind and I still don't want to, I mean, it's tempting, I have to admit, to sudden, to kind of even let go of that sometimes and wallow in this joy because it's such a beautiful feeling when I am fully let go into what feels like Sometimes I just feel like I'm on a magic carpet holding on for dear life and all of these gifts are coming to me and the gratitude that I get from that and the joy that I have from every single thing in my life meaning something.

Hood: Well, you said a couple of things.

I mean, letting go, I think, is a very revealing phrase because I think a lot of us as individuals are overly concerned about presenting ourselves as irrational creatures.

We value ourselves in terms of what other people think about us.

We're preoccupied by what other people think about us and to some extent, a lot of our behavior, the way we live our lives, is in reflection of what others think about us and that preoccupation can be very distorting.

So when you say you're letting go, in many ways, you're losing that kind of anxiety, which makes you feel great and so again, that makes perfect sense to me.

As to quantum, we are energy and all matter is energy and waveforms and so at some level, the system of the universe, these things are not entirely impossible.

But I have no framework in which to understand them as a scientist.

That's simply the case that we just don't have a mindset.

Well, certainly I don't have that mindset, which allows me to think about the interconnectivity of everything in that way.

But ultimately, quantum tells us that everything is interconnected.

Parry: Entangled.

Yeah.

Doesn't it also excite you that the possibility of these interconnections might actually mean something for us all as a species?

Hood: Yeah, well, I'm quite an excitable guy anyway.

I mean, I think that the notion of the fantastic is exciting.

But I also get excited by truth.

I get excited when I can understand something which is perplexing.

I love the reveal.

That's why I find science such a satisfying experience, that we're discovering things that no one else has found before, and we have a way of thinking about it, and it makes predictions and I love that framework.

But I do understand that all science is an approximation of the true reality of the universe.

We're always trying to pick away at the true reality and that's always going to be an ongoing process and I doubt we'll ever actually ever get there.

But that process, that journey, to me, is exciting.

So yeah, I love the fantastic.

I love the possibility of these things.

But for me, a greater joy is actually the discovery.

Discovery to me is what gives me the excitement, gets me out of bed in the morning.

Parry: And would you also perhaps see in your own professional life the possibility of exploring that less rational? Because it is a state of mind in a way.

Hood: Yeah, well we do, to some extent, some of my research does touch on that, but we try to provide alternative rational explanations for what people will think about as being supernatural.

So we're interested in the idea that evil is actually a physical force that can transfer through touch.

We're doing research at the moment, showing that people will wash their hands if they think they've come into contact with something which was evil.

So that is an irrational behavior, but on another level, it's quite rational, because you don't know why someone's evil.

Maybe there is some toxin, maybe there was something.

So in our kind of thinking, which evolved, we've actually got these ways of thinking and behaviour which could be adaptive.

So it doesn't make it irrational, it's just not rational in terms of the science behind it.

Science does revise ideas and sometimes things which were thought to be true turn out not to be true.

But that doesn't mean that we should abandon the process because it's self-correcting.

If it's good science, it should be self-correcting and of course, all the technologies that we enjoy today, everything around us is a product of science.

So it's not wishful thinking.

But that doesn't mean that we should just dismiss everything that doesn't have a scientific basis, because I think a lot about humans is this other aspect of our identity, which is to have beliefs and so whilst beliefs themselves are not scientific, it's perfectly understandable that you should have this way of being together.

You know, what binds us together are beliefs.

We don't want to have evidence that holds us together.

We want to be able to trust each other on an assumption that there's a shared belief system and that's why we have belief systems.

They are the glue which pulls together.

Because if I was to show you the evidence, Bruce, then I know that you wouldn't necessarily be trusting me.

I'd be showing you objective evidence.

But if we have a shared belief system, then I can trust you because you're doing it or behaving in a way when you're just putting your faith in me.

So belief systems are really important for holding together, you know, societies.

Part II: Supernatural Beliefs

`https://vimeo.com/253780817`

Parry: I was wondering what you thought about the notion that consciousness, for example, might be at the heart of everything and rather than consciousness being within us, it perhaps us being a receptor that is tapping into that.

Hood: The C word, consciousness. I have no scientific explanation how we have consciousness, the subjectivity of consciousness.

I don't think anyone does at this point in time, and it's not clear we ever would or what would be an adequate explanation.

It's something which I know I have, and I assume everyone else does, but where it comes from is a bit of a mystery.

I mean, there's some profound questions about the mind and the brain.

The whole idea that a physical system can produce mental life in itself is a very difficult kind of conundrum, how does that happen? If we're just connections and we're just sort of firings and squiggles of electrical firing, surely you could build a robot that has consciousness.

That would be the ultimate argument and I would say yes, you probably could, because otherwise you would have to have an additional property, a spiritual realm, a spiritual dimension, to create that unique human experience.

But I think we are just very sophisticated meat machines.

It comes with this kind of software, that creates this richness of mental life.

But I don't think I need to go down the realm of the supernatural.

I think that once we really begin to understand the complexity of this system, then we'll be closer to kind of getting to grasp.

But ultimately, I do accept that the idea that a mental life can emerge from a physical system is just inherently very difficult.

Now, You talk about the possibility of there being a collective consciousness that we can tap into, like we're receivers.

Parry: We are actually it, except that we're kind of a part of it, and yet somewhat thinking that we're separate from it.

Hood: Yeah.

I mean, I have no real perspective on that, because I wouldn't even know how to grapple with it.

You know, it's almost so intangible that I would have a problem from a scientific perspective of addressing it.

But I can certainly understand why people believe that's the case.

I believe, I understand they can have beliefs about energies, chi, and all these Eastern notions of there being this kind of unifying forces.

That's entirely, you know, it's been around for a very long time and I can understand where that comes from.

I study children normally and we see these things appearing in children's reasoning spontaneously, which, by the way, leads me to think that we don't necessarily indoctrinate beliefs.

I think we give children ideas.

But I think it's a natural way of seeing the world.

It's a natural way of thinking about ourselves and many of the so-called beliefs which become the bedrock of religions, you can trace those origins into early children and so I think that's kind of in itself a very interesting kind of fact.

Parry: Or another way of looking at it, that is perhaps that the children are able to tap in to the reality and actually we are conditioning them out of that.

Hood: I think that's true.

I mean, the evidence suggests that we do educate our children out of some of their belief systems.

But what might interest you is these never really entirely go away.

So you can have very rational scientists behaving very irrationally under the right circumstances.

It's as if we kind of operate in two modes, We have an emotional, intuitive way of seeing the world, but then we have to adopt this rational view, which is a very Western kind of perspective.

But whether or not children are actually tapping into some reality, I probably wouldn't accept that.

I think it's just the way that our brain has evolved to make sense of the world by evoking structure, order, by evoking the notion of there being energies, by considering the impossibility of annihilation, that there can't be a suddenly you don't exist anymore.

afterlife belief.

That's common to just about every religion.

These are things which children will naturally just kind of come up with.

So I think it's just a byproduct, if you like, of a brain which is trying to impose structure and order.

But of course, as you say, we can then give them some content, we can educate them, we can tell them about deities, we can create elaborate belief systems that we then impose upon the children.

Well, I think the thing is, if we understand the natural basis for these ways of thinking.

If we understand the notion of identity, this is my thing, the self is not this unified thing.

We have this experience that we're kind of unified individuals.

But as soon as you take drugs which distort perception, you realize then actually what you've been experiencing all your life is not what it really is.

You know, you're constructing, you've got the story of identity, you've got the story of who you are based on the way you live your lives, what you've been told, the pressures on us to conform.

These shape us and when you have these experiences where you go out into the world and meet indigenous tribes or peoples who have different viewpoints, you realize to what extent you are a constructed being.

So I think that's the difference.

I understand the process by which we form these constructed selves and I understand that this is not a true reflection of reality.

It's one which is generated by our brains.

But then I don't tip it all the way over to then advocating, well, it must be supernatural rather than a natural way of seeing the world.

So I think it's entirely plausible, entirely true, your experiences.

But I would argue that they're just natural ways of seeing the world.

You don't need to have a supernatural explanation.

Parry: Maybe you could tell me what you mean by the difference between natural and supernatural.

What is the distinction?

Hood: Well, I think a supernatural explanation is 1 which is one which defies any natural explanation.

It's almost the default.

If it's not got a natural explanation and you think there's something going on, then by definition, it must be a supernatural.

But as to why it's there, I mean, I've got this idea that we need the supernatural.

We need to have things which are profound.

Because it's a little bit like the notion of belief and faith.

We have to have things which transcend any earthly explanation, because that gives us the possibility that there is this additional dimension to reality and these are the sorts of things which will motivate people to do things, to create music, to write operas, to do things, to aspire to something which is more than the earthly notion of the world.

So we almost need this kind of extra dimension to give purpose and meaning to life.

Parry: You started out, though, by accepting that there are There are areas of science in the quantum world, talking about entanglement and what have you, and there are also scientists that suggest that consciousness may be a part of this, that suddenly the supernatural sort of disintegrates and there seems to be perhaps a rational explanation for some of these things.

There could be an explanation that sort of disintegrates the supernatural.

Do you still feel that could be possible?

Hood: Well, I think the thing is, as a scientist, I need evidence.

Now, The evidence I have for the consciousness is my own experience of subjectivity.

Yet I can't know with any certainty that your consciousness is the same as mine or that indeed you're not just a very sophisticated zombie.

I mean, these are just the old philosophical problems.

How do you know someone else's mind? Now, I think that's a totally different issue as to things which are more supernatural, where there are claims for abilities and connections and psychic and precognition.

Those are the things which you can and should be able to accumulate evidence and if you don't, then I would argue that they're not, they're apparent, they're not real.

So I suppose there's a difference, it all comes down to what's your evidence and I think I have enough subjective evidence for consciousness to know that it's a phenomenon, although I'd be very pressed to describe what it was like not to be conscious, because it's almost like the default.

So I suppose that's where I'm coming from.

For me, supernatural is really to do with all those explanations which appeal to entities or forces or energies or patterns which defy a natural explanation and if someone's going to make a claim like that, then I would need to see the evidence for it.

But I wouldn't put consciousness into the same package, if you understand.

Marilyn Monk

Part I: Molecular Biology

https://vimeo.com/258883073

Marilyn: It's interesting you asked that question, will science be able to answer stuff of the heart, the poet? Because that's exactly what I'm interested in at the moment, is the actual science of our imagination, how our imagination, our thoughts, emotions, can actually program our genes and change our lives and change our environment.

So Previously, to put those two words together, the science of imagination would have been considered quite heretical, because normally in science we keep the stuff of imagination and the stuff of the mystic, the bigger picture, the transcendental, well out of the lab, because we see them as not relevant to scientific endeavour, because imagination is the, it's actually mental faculty of of creating images of objects that are not present to the senses and belief is actually taking on that those imagined objects are true and obviously imagination and belief are totally in the way of scientific progress, because imagination isn't seen as reality and a belief is certainly drummed out of the young scientist very early on.

as a story that would really get in the way of making valid discoveries.

So, but now I am beginning to see the crossover between science and imagination because that's our inner environment, our imagination is programming our genes in a way that affects our whole lives and in fact the lives of future generations.

That's a new aspect of epigenetics which has been part of my work in the 80s. Yeah, early on.

Bruce: Wow. Is this incontrovertible, Marilyn? Is the reprogramming of our genes as a result of our thought patterns? Is this accepted now and understood?

Marilyn: Yes, it's definitely there's a lot of evidence accumulating.

I mean, you could, I mean, obviously we knew that the whole nature-nurture debate, is it our genes that are controlling our life? or our environment that's regulating our life and it's not one against the other.

It's somehow at the interface of our genes with the environment and up until recently, since the discovery of DNA, there's been what's called the central dogma, that genes are everything, that your DNA makes RNA, makes protein and that That's who you are, basically.

But now much more important than, and of course that was very much fuelled by the whole endeavour to sequence the human genome and it was thought that once we had the sequence of all the 20,000 genes, well at the time there was thought to be 100,000 genes, but now I know there's 20,000 genes.

and we'd know every gene and we'd be able to sequence the genome of every person and it would solve all problems of disease and illness and so on.

But that's not been the case because I say that it's the programming of our genes by epigenetic programming, deciding which genes are on in the cells and which genes are

off according to the environment is more important than the genes themselves and And I suppose what brings imagination in is that normally we think of our environment as what's out there, you know, what you see around you.

Whereas it's best to consider your environment, you know, extending from the core of your being to the end of the cosmos and if I were to actually make a distinction, which is a false distinction, we could think of our inner environment, our thoughts, our feelings, emotions, our imagination, what we expect out of life, preconceived ideas and so on, that inner environment I think is even more important in programming us for our life view and our health, in terms of lifestyle diseases, mental illness, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, stroke, cancer and so on.

It's actually your inner environment is incredibly important in terms of your programming of your genes in all your cells.

Bruce: It's a huge thing to take on board.

It's like, I mean, it feels intuitive in so many ways, but it goes against some things that so many of us hold to be a truism in our society, which is actually we are much more predetermined through our genetics.

Marilyn: Well, epigenetics.

is the programming of the genes in our cells and deciding which genes are on and which are off by modifications superimposed upon the genes.

You could consider that our genes are the hardware, an analogy with a computer, and the epigenetic programming is a software, and it's the programming that's all important and obviously it was known in terms of the different cell types in your body.

So like all cells in your body are in service to you, a higher order structure, and there's a division of labour and they're doing different things.

So they all have the same 20,000 genes, but nerve cells have nerve genes on, muscle cells have muscle genes on, et cetera, et cetera and they turn off the other genes so that they have all these different functions according to requirement for function in a specific tissue.

So it's been known for some time that the genes in your cells are programmed for the cells to perform different functions, and the term epigenetics was coined by Waddington in the 40s and the 50s, but we didn't know the mechanisms and so a lot of my work in the 80s was concerned with discovering one of the mechanisms, which is a chemical modification of one of the bases of DNA, and methylation of the base, and if methylation has occurred on that DNA base cytosine in a regulated region of the gene, that gene's turned off.

So my work was partly concerned with that, and showing that the modification could indeed go through sperm and egg, which is a really important discovery because the dismissal of Lamarckian inheritance, transmitting traits to your offspring according to the way you live your life, was thrown out with the discovery of DNA and the central dogma because nobody could think of a possible mechanism.

So I suppose what's happened in the 80s and since is that we know now the mechanisms of turning the genes on and off and in addition, so we know that in the fetus,

when it's developing in the womb, as the genes are programmed in the different cells to make nerve cells and muscle cells, the heart and the liver and the different organs, So we know we call that tissue-specific epigenetic programming to make the different organs of the fetus.

But there's an awful lot of programming also going on in the womb and in the newborn, and in fact throughout life, that's affecting your, what I call inclusively, life view, the sense of your potential in life, and also programming your future health and longevity and your well-being.

So this was all known at the whole person level.

So at the whole person level, we knew intuitively, didn't we, that positive thinking and imaging and living a peaceful life were very good for your health and then there were some scientific studies done with large cohorts of people in America to show that things like religion is good for yourself.

your health, living in a safe environment, being educated, being married, having a good social network, all these things were shown to affect your health, but it was not known how and also, research at the whole person level is very difficult because of reverse causality.

Do you have a better well-being because you're married, or you're married because you already had a better well-being? and also count, what's called confounding influences, getting your groups exactly the same, except one group meditates and the other one doesn't.

But now we know how this works at the epigenetic level, the actual programming of genes that are concerned with lifelong stress and can occur in the developing fetus if the mother's stressed.

or according to her nutrition, or whether she's drinking and smoking.

So we can show now at the genetic level, genes being turned off and on, that are going to affect that baby for life and then immediately after birth, the newborn's being adapted to the physical, nutritional, emotional, psychological environment, so that if there's neglect, abandonment, abuse, and so on in childhood, that child is being the genes are being programmed for stress and increased likelihood of illness.

So now we know that, how it's working, we can actually identify the genes that are being turned off.

Bruce: Does this diminish to some degree our previous perception of how important genes were? But does it almost negate them fully? Can you...

Marilyn: No, the genes are important, but more important than that is how they're programmed on and off.

It's like the software is more important than the hardware in terms of your...

the way you live your life and what's available to you and how stressed you are and so on.

It doesn't make them less important, but it makes the programming of them very important.

Bruce: What about transgenerational epigenetics?

Marilyn: During pregnancy, you've got to distinguish different levels of gene programming.

There's obviously tissue-specific gene programming.

All cells in the body have the same 20,000 genes, but they do different things according to the programming of these genes.

Certain different subpopulations are on and the rest are off.

There are some genes called housekeeping genes that are on all cells, and they're genes concerned with growth and division, repair and so on.

But then there are other tissue-specific genes that makes nerve, nerve, muscle, muscle, skin, skin, that are only on in the cells.

where they're required for function, and in other cells they're turned off.

So that's called tissue-specific gene programming, and we now know that's by epigenetic modification of the genes to turn them on or off and it's heritable cell to cell, because obviously a muscle cell is a muscle.

It divides and makes another muscle cell and so it's heritable cell to cell.

So these modifications are heritable through cell division and then you have what you could call it adaptive gene programming, adapting cells to the environment.

So if the environment is poisonous or stressful, then there are genes, like if the mother's stressed, then the fetus is going to be programmed for stress as well.

For instance, there's a gene in hippocampus called the glucocorticoid receptor, and its job is to mop up cortisols and get rid of them.

Cortisol is a stress molecule produced by the HPA axis, hypothalamus, pituitary adrenals, and the cortisol gets mopped off by the glucocorticoid receptor.

But if the stress is prolonged in the mother and the fetus, the gene gets methylated and turned off in a heritable way, because the methylation modification is inherited throughout life.

So you've got this adaptive programming that adapts to emotional, psychological environment and that's also happening in the fetus, and particularly in the newborn.

So you could ask in the newborn if the environment is abusive, if there's neglect, abandonment.

Then it's like a big shutdown.

Like I said, Pavlov called it transmarginal inhibition.

The whole system seems to shut down.

It's like it's making the individual less sensitive.

But of course, if you're less sensitive, you're less compassionate and less caring for others and so there's trouble from the beginning.

So that's adaptive programming.

The central dogma, DNA, the genes are all and govern your life.

The whole idea of Lamarckian inheritance, Darwin was Lamarckian.

He believed He thought, I don't have very cautious using the belief, what he might have observed, that the way we live our lives affects future generations.

But that's complicated because it could be cultural inheritance and cultural inheritance is an inheritance that cares, that's got nothing to do with the genes.

It's like you bring up your kids a certain way, and you have certain customs and traditions, and your kids will carry those customs and traditions forward.

There's nothing to do with the genes.

The so-called Lamarckian inheritance, the idea that the giraffe's neck is long because it's reaching up for leaves, of course it's reaching up, then it's somehow you change the genes, so progeny inherit long necks, or the blacksmith's muscles, he develops muscles, so his kids will have bigger muscles.

That's so-called Lamarckian inheritance was definitely thrown out because they couldn't see a molecular mechanism.

But we and others showed that this modification of a gene in an individual can actually be transmitted through the sperm and the egg into the next generation so that the offspring can inherit the gene already off and so that provides the molecular mechanism.

The reason I'm hesitating here is that one of the other things that we discovered was what we call deprogramming, that early in development the sperm and the egg cells carry on their genes, programming to make sperm, programming to make eggs and in the first week or so of development, one cell to two cell, four cells to 8 cells, these programs have to be erased and what we shared was that the methylation modification of the genes in the sperm and egg, which is different, was wiped out in the first week of development.

It's called deprogramming and it leads to the totipotent tabula rasa stem cell that's going to make the new individual.

So for a gene that's been modified in the parents to go through to the offspring, it has to escape this erasure and be taken into the somatic cells and germ cells of the offspring.

But we're sure that happens.

That definitely does happen.

The way we live our lives, we have more longitudinal responsibility because it's going into the next generations and beyond, rather than what we mostly think, because we have lateral responsibility.

We have to look after everybody around us, but we're also responsible for future generations and if our imagination, our inner environment, is programming our genes for stress, et cetera, well-being, then even the way we think, Our life view and the way we see our lives is really important for future generations.

Part II: Awareness

`https://vimeo.com/258901448`

Bruce: How can we improve our awareness?

Marilyn: Be scientists! (laughs) Because as a scientist, you know, as a scientist, you have a box called your hypothesis and you create that hypothesis to put some facts in and arrange them, they fit into that box and then you hypothesize if these all things fit, then we'll expect this and this and this to happen, right? But then as a scientist, what you have to do is disprove your hypothesis.

You must disprove it.

That's what you must work to do.

So you must look for the things that don't fit.

So you have to really widen your awareness.

You've got to notice the anomalies and not just call them artifacts or a bad batch of primers or somebody's painting in the corridor.

You actually notice all the things that don't fit and you mustn't have a pet hypothesis, an expectation, I like this and I want this to be this way, I want this to work this way, because then and then and then, because then you won't do the right controls, you won't see the things that don't fit and so, you know, what makes a good scientist is somebody who really doubts their own view of things.

and really look for the things that don't fit and if you're looking for things that don't fit, of course you have a much, you develop a wider awareness.

You're sort of out on the horizon.

You know, what's that over there? What's that over there? Because mostly we're just here, just a few things and making up the rest, you just make up the rest to suit what you expect.

So you mustn't have any preconceived ideas or pet hypotheses.

I mean, obviously, I mean, that's the way we operate, with yesterday, what happened yesterday and what we need to get for the fridge and what's on our shopping list and, obviously we're operating, protecting for the faster future very efficiently.

But I guess, as you would know, we must take a rest from that and just practice being the pure witness.

Who doesn't have any preconceived ideas or expectations for things to be a certain way?

Richard Wilkinson

Part I: Inequality & Health

`https://vimeo.com/235902098`

Richard: After having shown what inequality does to a society, I mean, bigger differences between rich and poor are damaging in all sorts of ways.

Basically, all the problems that are more common at the bottom of the ladder get worse in more unequal societies.

So you get more violence, more teenage births, more obesity, more drug problems, lower life expectancy.

All that kind of thing gets much worse.

But a lot of those sorts of problems In a way, you can tell that it's a psychological effect of inequality because there are things to do with how people behave, and whether it's violence or drugs or whatever and so we're now thinking more about what social hierarchy does to us mentally, psychologically and One of the really powerful things it does, I think, is make us more worried about how we're seen and judged by others.

I mean, if some people are enormously important and other people don't seem to matter at all, you know, where do you come? What do people think of you? And I think that those sorts of worries about how we're seen and judged are made worse still because we're constantly meeting strangers.

Instead of being embedded in a community of people who are nurse, well, you know, they're not going to be affected much by what I do today because they've known me all my life.

In our society, we're meeting new people and having to worry about how we present ourselves all the time and so those issues to do with low self-esteem, lack of confidence, social anxieties.

Or on the other hand, how people respond to the same sort of concern over judgments, which makes others talk themselves up and so, you know, they find ways of bringing into a conversation that they were one of the youngest people to be promoted for, or they won this prize, or, all their achievements.

So we think one of the effects of bigger income differences is people are less modest about their achievements and abilities and I think that, people in Britain have lost their modesty as we've become a more unequal society.

Bruce: And so what do you think are the solutions?

Richard: And the main thing we can do is to reduce the social hierarchy and it's quite clear from our previous work that increased inequality worsens all the problems to do with class and status.

More status insecurity, more status seeking, and with that driving consumerism because, you know, money is how we express what we're worth.

So I think we can dramatically reduce income inequality in the rich developed societies like the Scandinavian ones, where the income differences seem half as big as ours and I think that has a profound effect on social relations.

People trust each other more, the community life is stronger.

But I think we, you know, moving towards a more sustainable economy, we need to make it a more local economy and that too, as people get to know each other more and start to be more socially embedded and no longer racked by the inequalities and worries about status.

I think all those have very important psychological effects because, we know ourselves through each other's eyes.

We're in a way, biologically programmed like that.

My experience, when I want the ground to swallow me up because I've done something so stupid in front of someone else, those kinds of worries and we're extraordinarily sensitive to that kind of shame and embarrassment.

It's actually crucial to being a...

That we are so sensitive to shame and embarrassment is essential to an animal like human beings that depends on a learned cultural way of life rather than an instinctively programmed way of life.

Because how I behave in an acceptable way is by minding very much what other people think of me.

You are the bearers of culture and if I'm to behave in acceptable ways in this culture, I have to be worried about how other people, and I have to feel that sense of shame and embarrassment and worry about looking stupid.

I always used to, in some lectures I gave, I used to give the example that I could make my daughter, when she was in her teens, agree to almost anything by threatening to sing on the street, walking down the road with her.

That was the ultimate embarrassment.

She'd agree to anything rather than that.

Why inequality is important, I think, isn't to do with fairly superficial social comparisons, whether my neighbor has a better car than I do and things like that.

It's something that is much more deep-seated.

I mean, in almost any species, members of the same species have the same needs, and so they can fight over everything.

if you look at the bird table in your garden, it's birds of the same species who fight each other off the food or whatever.

The potential for conflict between members of the same species is always very high because they have the same needs and people who study, I don't know, monkeys in the wild and so on, always talking about how dominance pushes subordinates, not only off the food, But, if they find a shady place to sleep under a tree, they'll push a subordinate out of that.

So, conflict over sexual partners, over access to all the necessities of life and of course, that's what the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes saw as the fundamental political problem.

You know, life is nasty, brutish and short if you don't have a government to keep the peace, because we will fight each other for everything, he thought.

But what he missed, I think, was that in most hunting and gathering societies, that cover 90% or more of human existence, they avoided some of that potential for conflict through food sharing, gift exchange, great equality.

because you can't be, there wasn't a government or police force to protect you from each other, so you had to manage relationships so that people didn't have it in for you, make those huge investments in social relationships and I think what comes out of it is really that social relationships, other people can be the best or the worst.

You can be my most feared rival and adversary.

We can fight over everything.

Or we can be the best sources of cooperation, support, assistance, learning, love, whatever it is.

So other people can be the best or the worst and one of the really interesting and exciting things that has come out of health research over the last, you know, 20 years or so is how important the effect of friendship is on death rates.

Friendship is highly protective of health.

People who have good friendships, good relationships with their partners, and you can actually see that in experiments where they make little wounds on people's backs of people's hands, volunteers, they heal more slowly if you have a bad relationship with your partner.

People with fewer friendships are more likely to catch colds from the same measured exposure to infection and These studies suggest that whether or not you have friends is more important or as important to survival in a follow-up period than whether or not you smoke and of course, the symbol of friendship is the gift.

The gift is, it's my acknowledgement that I recognise your needs.

I'm not going to fight you over this.

and your sense of indebtedness that may make you reciprocate the gift.

Some anthropologists have called that a basic social compact between people.

But the alternative is the conflict.

But that forms a hierarchy, because as I come to know that you win every fight, I don't actually fight you.

I recognize that I'm subordinate and so the fighting for things means you get a social hierarchy based on a recognition of physical strength.

So the two opposite ways human beings can come together are as equals sharing, or in a dominance hierarchy where the strong get the, you know, and so it's no chance that the The rich have always been the high status, the powerful, those things always go together and so what's our work on inequality, showing how damaging bigger income differences are in a society, what that is reflecting is our extraordinary sensitivity, both to friendship and to social hierarchy.

You know, if you put me down, If you treat me as inferior, I get really wild and people who study violence say again and again, the most common trigger for violence is loss of face, humiliation, being disrespected, put down and so the health research, which shows how crucially important social hierarchy is and how crucially important friendship is and social hierarchy damaging, low status damaging, friendships are good.

It's telling us about social stressors.

It's the social stress that matters and another really interesting part of this is as we got started to get interested in health research, in the biological effects of stress.

Psychologists started to do lots of experiments, inviting volunteers into a laboratory and getting them to do stressful things while monitoring their levels of stress hormones.

You can monitor them in saliva or blood samples and endless different experiments where they were looking at the responses of these stress hormones to doing stressful things.

But all the experiments use different stressors and you might be asked to write about an unpleasant experience you'd had, just so we could see how he responds to that stress, or get you to do some mathematical problems.

Maybe you'd have to read your marks out to everyone afterwards so we'd all know what an idiot he is, all that kind of thing and then in what's called a meta-analysis, where they look at all the data from all these studies, They were interested in what kinds of stress most reliably push up our levels of stress hormones and they found it was stressors that involve what they called social evaluative threats.

Threats to self-esteem or social status where others can negatively judge your ability or whatever and so in a way that's telling us that the most Affective sources of stress are these social judgments and the way in which we know each other through each other's eyes and big income differences feed directly into that.

Some people are even more important.

We respect them, think they're brilliant, and other people, you know, worthless and we all get very twitchy about where we come and where we're seen and what other people think of us.

Bruce: In a really complex society like in a city, is it possible to find that equality that just goes beyond into the stranger and then the next stranger and the next stranger?

Richard: Yeah, I think one of the reasons why there's such a strong relationship between friendship and health is that it is telling us whether we are relaxed with other people or whether we're very uptight and find social contact rather than ordeal because of the, if you get invited out, do say, oh Christ, I don't know if I can face it tonight.

Because instead of being relaxed with other people, whoever they are, you know, you feel you've got to put your best face on and make a good impression and so on and I think you can have a society where people feel easily accepted, which is not so hierarchical, where we are all more relaxed with each other and I think, and in terms of what makes people happy, endlessly people are thinking that buying things, having things, consumerism and so on, but we all actually know what we enjoy most is sitting with friends and enjoying chatting with them and the jokes and so on.

That's, what people really enjoy and if you're in a society where there aren't those strong social evaluative judgments intensified by more inequality, and, you know, if we are any way a bit, we're no longer embedded in communities, We are meeting other strangers all the time, but that wouldn't be so difficult if there wasn't this constant idea in our minds that some people are worth so much more than others and of course, in a social hierarchy, we are...

Part of our evolved psychology is to be very aware of and concerned with position in the hierarchy.

There's psychological experiments that suggest that people make judgments of their relative standing within a minute or so of starting a conversation.

Do it very quickly and all that.

You know, we can live in the most egalitarian societies.

We can also live in the most awful hierarchies.

But that has very profound effects on social relationships and there is no doubt that we are more at ease in the more egalitarian settings and we all experience both, when we have friends in or with our family or whatever, it's more egalitarian.

But in other situations we're snobbish, we name drop and we're aware of status and so on and playing that game.

Bruce: Many of these studies that have been done are obviously on our society as it already exists and so these stresses and these emotions that we're expressing are often just as the result of something that's already happening.

happened, that we are feeling these stresses because we are already conditioned to feel that inferiority, that anxiety, that insecurity perhaps.

Where there's other parts of the world that maybe those insecurities aren't so evident because we aren't conditioned to feel them so much.

I don't know if that makes sense, but what I guess I'm getting at is One of the things that I'm interested in looking at on this journey is how to undo some of that conditioning and how to find a more tranquil inner peace regardless of the external influences.

Is that in some way part of your research too?

Richard: Well, I think that people too often think, you know, we've either got this kind of society, market class-based market democracies, Or we've got something bizarrely different, like small-scale hunting and gathering societies, nomadic groups and so on.

I think people don't realise how different different developed societies can be.

We were much more equal in the 1960s and 70s.

It was really under Thatcher and Reagan with sort of neoliberal economics that income differences really widened dramatically and I think we're all aware that the social fabric in our society has changed.

You know, people now feel they have to project a much tougher image, be much more streetwise, and we're aware of all sorts of social problems that we know are related to inequality increasing.

So I think that we can make major differences simply by reducing, reducing income differences.

That's what I think is exciting about our work.

It suggests there is a policy handle on the psychosocial well-being of our whole society.

But it doesn't, people don't change instantly, obviously and it looks as if the nature of social relationships is has really powerful effects on early childhood development and we've known for a very long time that early childhood is important in terms of

the developing personality and so on and again, we see that in lots of different animal species.

There's A sensitive period, you know, in kittens and puppies and so on and if they're treated nicely, they develop one way and if you kick them around, they become pretty, you know, nasty and that early sensitivity is about adapting to the kind of world you've got to deal with and in human beings, it's about adapting to the kind of social relationships.

So am I in a society where I'm going to have to fight for what I can get, learn not to trust others because we're rivals? Or am I growing up in a society where I depend on reciprocity, on mutuality, on cooperation, on empathy, which needs a quite different emotional and cognitive development.

So there are adult responses to social status differences, to your social position, to the quality of social relationships, but they're also how the parental experience of adversity are passed on to children and we're now learning more about the ways in which early experience switches genes on and off, changes gene expression, guiding that process, you know, so you become more streetwise, tougher.

or more empathetic and better at sharing and so on.

It's not that kids who have had a difficult early childhood are damaged.

They're being prepared for a different social environment.

The idea that the rising tide of economic growth, the society getting richer, benefits everyone.

We know that over the last 30 years or so, that most of the benefits of growth have gone to the rich and in some countries, like the States, the poor have hardly gained at all.

So it hasn't lifted all boats.

But even if it did, amongst the rich developed societies, it no longer looks as if well-being improves by higher material standards and that's certainly true in poorer countries.

You raise the living standards and all sorts of things get better because many people haven't had access to basic necessities.

But for us in the rich developed world, it looks as if having more and more of everything makes less and less difference.

You know, we've got the basics and so, for instance, if you look at the relationship between gross national product per capita, average income, in rich developed societies and life expectancy, there's no connection at all.

You get countries like Greece and Portugal and Israel, half as rich as the US and Norway, and no relationship with life expectancy at all and yet within each country, there are enormous differences in life expectancy.

So, you know, in most of our cities, you find anything from 5 to 10 12 years difference in life expectancy between rich and poor areas, often in the same city.

The difference in life expectancy between people in professional occupations, doctors, lawyers, directors of larger companies and unskilled manual workers, is, you know, anything from 5 to 10 years in Britain.

It's an appalling human rights abuse and yet, although that's related to income differences within our society, As I said, the income differences between each country no longer seem to matter in the rich world.

What that means is that within our societies, we're looking at the difference in relative income, where we stand in relation to each other, social position, and how big the gaps are between us.

That's what matters now, through those things to do with more with sense of superiority and inferiority.

those worries about being looked down on and so on and that seems to drive endless social problems.

I know, we all know that child well-being is worse in the poorest areas.

The kids' maths and literacy scores, educational performance is worse, there's more violence, there's more obesity, there's lower life expectancy.

All those problems have that same pattern.

so although there's depression and ill health and violence at the top of society, they're all more common at the bottom.

Now, all those problems, you might think, okay, they're worse at the bottom because society just sorts people out.

These vulnerable people, the hopeless ones move down and the resilient move up.

But what we find is that societies with bigger income differences have anything from twice as much of those kinds of problems to 10 times as much, which means they are responses to social status differentiation itself.

I mean that we know there are problems related to social status and they get worse if you increase the social status differences.

Not just a little bit worse, but hugely much worse.

So it's not a matter of simply sorting the population.

It's something that increasing the importance of social status does to all of us.

Not just to the poor, even better off people live less well.

You know, if middle class people with good incomes, education, jobs, if they lived in a more equal society on the same income, the same jobs and so on, they'd probably live a little bit longer.

Their children would do a little bit better at school.

they'd be less likely to become victims of violence.

The community life would be a bit stronger.

The kids would be less likely to get involved in drugs or become teenage parents.

In that sense, we all do better in a more equal society.

Bruce: Does your work also look at how difficult or easy it is to break out of the social layer in which you were born?

Richard: Yes, we've looked...

using other people's measures of social status, social mobility, how much people move up and down the social ladder.

It's important because I think a lot of people imagine that big income differences are somehow fair if we can all find the right place to slot in that suits our abilities and so on.

But what the data shows very clearly is that Societies with bigger income differences have less social mobility.

So Britain and the United States, which are one of the more unequal, amongst the more unequal of the rich developed countries, have low social mobility.

You know, we sometimes show the graph to American audiences and we say a few Americans really want to live the American dream.

not just dream it, you should go to Denmark or one of the Scandinavian countries where social mobility is so much higher and people sometimes describing that data say, you know, maybe it's because in a more unequal society the social ladder is steeper, it's harder to get up, or the rungs on the ladder are further apart.

But those are just analogies and I think that actually what's going on is there are more downward social prejudices, more snobbishness, people judge each other's ability more by class, so you know, somebody who talks like that or has only been to that school, they can't be much good.

Those kinds of prejudice, but also prejudice against ethnic minorities and I think evidence suggests women have a harder time in more unequal societies, all those prejudices against people more vulnerable in Greece.

It does pretty nasty things to us.

Undoubtedly, some genetic factors which play into our feelings about where we fit and our tendency to feel superior, inferior, our sensitivity to that, there are also the early childhood influences.

I am not arguing that there are not very powerful individual differences wherever they come from.

But rather, if you imagine a bunch of people having to jump over a bar, the individual differences will tell you who is going to fail, who's going to knock the bar.

But how high the bar is tells you how many people are going to fail and I'm concerned not with the individual differences accounting for whether it's you or you, but with the kind of social environment which makes all these issues more difficult for all of us.

It's always the more vulnerable who will fail, but that will be a larger group where the bar is higher.

So I think that's how the individual differences in vulnerability and the effect of the kind of society you live in come together.

Bruce: We only have a capacity to know a certain amount of people and our friendship level is sort of seems to be evolutionarily set to a couple of 100 people at max and that could be our community.

But as soon as we do start gathering in larger groups it becomes very hard to to keep equality, it just, and our openness and all of these other attributes that we can have when we feel secure in a small group.

What is the solution in the modern complex world that you see as far as this incredible tangle of society that we've found ourselves in?

Richard: I think people often imagine that inequality is inevitable in very large societies, that you will get a social hierarchy and class differences and so on.

In our work, what we do is not imagine any hypothetical societies, but we look at the scale of income differences in different societies.

You know, you can get that from the World Bank or the United Nations websites.

simply what is the scale of differences, for instance, between the top 20%, the richest 20%, and the poorest 20% in each country and so it's absolutely clear that some societies, some of the rich developed market democracies, have much more equality than others.

Some of them are very hierarchical, others less so and they've all got these class systems, but The degree of inequality varies and that variation is enough to have really important effects on the quality of social relations.

I mean, one of the things that suffers most obviously from greater inequality is the strength of community life, social cohesion, how much people trust each other and there are a lot of measures of those kinds of things, the cohesiveness of a community and you find it in the more unequal of the rich developed societies, maybe 15 or 20% of the population feel they can trust others, agree with the statement like most people can be trusted.

In the more equal of the rich developed countries, like the Scandinavian countries, you find that it's 60, 65% of the population feel they can trust others and there are just a lot of studies now showing that more inequality, not hypothetical perfect equal states, but more inequality or inequality has profound effects on the strength of community life.

How much people feel at ease with each other, whether they trust each other, or whether you start feeling social contact is a bit of an ordeal and keeping yourself to yourself and not talking to other people getting a bit sort of twitchy and neurotic about it all.

There is some research which suggests that green space is beneficial in parks and so on, in health terms to people who live near them and I don't know that anyone quite understands why that is, but I sometimes suspect that instead of seeing yourself simply in relation to other people, which maybe primes these worries about how you're seen and judged and that kind of thing, that you experience yourself in relation to nature, which is maybe more relaxing and I think it's almost certain that it's something to do with stress.

more and more we're learning about the very important biological effects of stress that comes through the mind and affects our bodies in all sorts of different ways.

Part II: Human Wellbeing

https://vimeo.com/253777273

Bruce: In your view of how we ought to go about finding equality, do you think that centralized control measures is the answer?

Richard: No, I think we know what happened, what went wrong in those societies, the communist societies, where there was an attempt to almost enforce greater equality.

I think that A lot of the problems of those societies came from the centralization of power.

Governments became too powerful and all the sort of elements of civic society, the voluntary associations and so on, all that disappeared and you get the restrictions on freedom of speech and all the rest of it.

I think the way we need to increase equality now is by extending democracy.

The reason why our societies have become more unequal since the end of the 1970s is because the rich have run away from the rest of us.

It's not the poor falling further behind.

It's mainly the rich have been getting richer much faster than other people have been getting richer.

So the gaps in income differences within companies, you know, in 19 Around about 1980, a CEO would get 20, 25 times more than the average production worker, the larger companies.

It's now 2, 3, sometimes 400 times as much, vastly much bigger.

So I think that those runaway incomes at the top reflect a lack of any democratic constraint.

Those people who felt they could do whatever they liked.

They didn't have to account for themselves to anyone.

I think we must make them accountable, partly by having more employee representatives on company boards, as they do in some European countries.

But we must also, I think, expand the more democratic sectors of our economy, the employee-owned companies, the mutuals, the cooperatives.

Those kinds of companies have much smaller income differences within them and a lot of the research suggests that they have higher levels of productivity.

People increasingly talking about the John Lewis model, where profits don't go to external shareholders, they go to the employees who've actually made those profits.

But I think one of the really important benefits of that kind of company or organisation, is people say it turns a company from being a piece of property into a community and in a way, it seems to me totally bizarre that, and although the value of a company used to depend on its buildings and plant and equipment, It now is primarily, its value is primarily a matter of the skills and people it's brought together, their knowledge, the way they work together and in a sense, what's happening when a company is taken over is a group of people is being bought and sold.

That's really a bizarre, anachronistic idea.

You know, people should be controlling their own workplaces democratically and when that happens, there seem to be so many other benefits, not only smaller income differences and better community, but ethically they seem to do better, you know, if you look at the sort of performance in environmental terms or in other ways.

So I think that's where we should be going in future.

Bruce: You talk about competition being one of the sources of us placing ourselves in these hierarchical structures.

With the way the world is constructed in the nation-state system, we naturally fight for our own, regardless of what that impact might be on other places around the world.

Does your research look at the really big picture as well and how we're placing ourselves? globally.

Richard: I think one of the things we did look at when comparing more and less equal societies is we thought that because community life is stronger in more equal societies and people trust each other more, that was probably indicative of a greater concern for the common good and somebody showed us a survey of business leaders' opinions, an international survey, And one of the questions business leaders were asked was about the importance of international environmental agreements and more equal societies, the business leaders thought they were much more important than the business leaders in more unequal societies, who obviously felt that, you know, It's not for them to have to worry about these things.

Our job is to look after ourselves and our own company.

A very different kind of philosophy, but one that comes out of that unequal social environment where people are competing for status and looking after themselves.

We look to see whether that greater awareness of the common good or public spiritedness, if you like, extended internationally.

We also, and it's difficult to get data, but we did get data on how much different countries recycle different waste materials.

Much more is recycled in more equal societies.

We looked at foreign aid.

More equal societies give more in foreign aid.

A whole range of things like that, which suggests that you move from just thinking about I must look after #1, these other people's welfare has nothing to do with me, they fend for themselves, to a sense of the common good and of reciprocity and cooperation and so on, of being involved in each other's lives more.

Bruce: Do you think there is place also for us to look at the cause, the root cause of some of these problems?

Richard: Yes, I think that we tend to be, to assume that what we see in our society is human nature and we don't realise how far we are affected by our social and material environment and of course, we all have a sense that we have a self, which is kind of within us and internal and private.

But actually, a number of psychologists argue that sense of selfhood only develops in social contact.

I develop my sense of self because I'm aware of my existence in your eyes and so instead of it being an internal thing, it's something that comes through social interaction.

We have a capacity and an attentiveness to social relationships and social judgments.

But what those social tensions are in our society, they can vary very much from one society to another and as we recognize that, I think we can start to change our society, reduce the amount of inequality, strengthen local communities in ways that we need to do to move towards environmental sustainability anyway and maybe the best is still to come.

We've got to the end of what we can do for the real quality of human life in the rich societies by ever higher levels of material consumption.

That consumerism, you know, it's a zero-sum game.

We can't all improve our status in relation to each other.

But now the way of improving the real quality of human life is to improve quality of social relationships, the social environment and I do think it's really exciting, the possibility that we might be able to do that by reducing income differences and you normally think, if you're going to improve the quality, if you like, the psychosocial well-being of a whole society, we'd all have to go and see shrinks.

It'd be quite impossible.

You can't do it.

We're landed with the way human beings are.

But the idea that there is a policy handle on it, and one that's accessible to governments and policy makers, that's really exciting, we could get to new levels of human well-being and that's what I think is important and exciting about the kind of data we've been looking at.

Chris Van Tullekan

`https://vimeo.com/253779326`

Chris: For a long time I was following you and then, you drew me into a world of, I guess, totally different mental experiences.

You were the one who said, go and live with remote indigenous peoples, take hallucinogenic drugs, open your closed, boring, scientific mind and I went and did that and I kind of joined you and then you've gone off on a tangent. Or maybe I have, I don't know.

I never know if I'm, am I the younger brother, am I the parent or the child?

Bruce: Chris, I've never, ever thought of you as that. I always look up to you, man. You're my sounding board. Whenever I come back, you're the guy I come and speak to.

It's like, it's my pilgrimage to Chris's house. It's like, what was that all about? And then you help me by putting it in a box and putting a lid on it and stick it in a corner and forget about it.

And then it comes back again. I'm like, no, that's not good enough. I want more. I need to know.

Chris: More. I guess sometimes I worry you're just going to go upriver and become Captain Kurtz. You're setting up a personality cult.

But I don't think, I know that isn't what you're doing. If you're doing that, there are other ways of doing that.

I'm really curious, I'm genuinely curious about what you find.

And I'm torn between going, for God's sake, Bruce, get a girlfriend, go back to your place in Aether, have one party a week, just live a normal life. You don't have to give it all up and giving you my small C conservative, boring life advice.

And on the other hand going, maybe you will find a new path to the waterfall, maybe you will do that.

Bruce: I don't know. I'm in a bit of a quandary at the moment, a bit of a crossroads and I'm letting go of some of my rationality and exploring sort of ethereal things that previously I would have thought were just stupid or not acceptable.

Chris: But I was always the one, when we did our big Arctic trip, I was the one who wouldn't let you talk about the weather because you'd jinx it.

Bruce: But I remember the last time I spoke to you on the phone, not last time, you were like, Bruce, I think it's we're all just a bunch of chemical reactions and then there you are doing ayahuasca and doing deep.

Chris: I hate it when you quote me back to myself.

What is odd is that in my job, in my professional life as a lab scientist, intellectually, that is the framework.

That's what I need to believe, is that it is all explicable by biochemistry.

But no one believes that and the more I do kind of basic science and try and probe the rules of life and how it all works, the more I am left, I think, coming to you and just going, I think you can probably explain this well.

But I don't become credulous, and that is what I worry about.

Do I worry about this? This is pretty slow.

This is what I say to you is, you know, it's possible to reject bits of scientific thinking without then embracing a load of crazy, vibrational, energetic beliefs and getting involved in a load of pseudo-scientific nonsense.

That maybe is my role in your life, is to go, no, I am the falsifier and that is the only bit of science that I think I understand, is that what science does is it does attempt to prove itself wrong.

The only time I worry is when you don't try and falsify yourself and you become open to anything and everyone.

Iain McGilchrist

https://vimeo.com/433029249

Ian: I went to, almost by chance, one day, I went to this lecture that John Cutting was giving.

Because in medical school I'd heard a lot about the left hemisphere, you see.

It did all these clever things, it reasoned, it had language.

And, you know, people didn't have a clue what the right hemisphere was for.

The best they could say was that it was somehow impressionistic and emotional and sort of pink and fluffy and given to painting pictures, you know and I went along to this seminar and here was a man who had spent a long, time looking at what happens when people have strokes, injuries, tumors that affect the right hemisphere.

What happens to their humanity, to their self, to their view of the world, in fact, to their reality? And in many important ways, it was changed and these ways are...

not so dramatic as when you lose speech, which is for most people a common effect of a left hemisphere stroke.

But they were nonetheless extraordinarily interesting to me because he was telling me that they lost the ability to have implicit understanding.

Anything that wasn't explicit, they couldn't understand.

So they couldn't understand tone of voice, body language, the expression of a face, inflection of the voice, understanding what the other person is thinking.

sense of humor, metaphor.

They couldn't understand metaphor and I mean, obviously this is the pooling together of many, many different kinds of illusion, but in the right hemisphere, these were the things, and also embodiment.

The body image in the right hemisphere, the sense of being connected to, living in the body, more profoundly underwritten by the right hemisphere than the left and when one talks like this, it all sounds very cut and dried.

It needs to be qualified.

It's not as cut and dried as that.

But this stuff, as you can imagine, struck me very forcibly and I went up to John after the lecture and said, this is very intriguing because of a book I wrote, which you might like to read, which he then did, he saw immediately the philosophical interest and we collaborated on some research on differences between right and left hemisphere conditions and what happens to people with schizophrenia and manic depressive psychosis.

I began to see that actually, inevitably, the two halves of the brain, if they are looking at things differently, not necessarily doing different things, not processing language or reason or whatever, but looking at language from a certain aspect, looking at reason from a certain aspect, the how, not the what, then that would inevitably lead to two different takes on the world and so these two hemispheres attend quite differently and

this is true in birds, it's true in rats, it's true in In all mammals we find, it may even be true in reptiles and fish, but it is certainly true in human beings.

So the left hemisphere pays a kind of focused, detailed attention to the world piecemeal.

It only sees a little tiny bit at a time, and it thinks that the world is put together from this bit and that bit and the other bit, whereas the other hemisphere has a broad consensual attention, which is taking in everything and looking out for the things that are anomalies.

because they may be dangerous or they may be interesting for other reasons.

We're all, of us, all the time using both our hemispheres.

Let's make that very clear.

Also, in the sort of measurable time of Western civilization, there may be small differences in the structure of the brain, but they're minor.

But I'm not talking about that.

I'm talking about the way in which we use our brains.

So if you like to look at it this way, there are available to your consciousness.

and your consciousness is synthesized out of two takes on the world.

It's done so seamlessly and so fast, this blending, or perhaps alternation between the views and the information that come from the left and the right hemisphere, that inside your consciousness, as it were, you're not aware of that happening.

Which is one of the reasons, one of the perhaps only reasons why it's useful to look at the brain in this way as a metaphor for what's going on, because you can look at the brain from the outside and see that actually, they are processing differently.

You can't tell that from just introspection.

You can look at it, you can only know that by examining scientific data.

But over time, one of those takes is going to tend to win out and there are a number of reasons why.

The first is that the left hemisphere's take is the one that makes you able to grasp things and manipulate them and civilizations have a habit of finding this rather addictive.

They get good at it, they tend to get overblown as they develop an empire, and then they tend to decay and you can look at that in all sorts of ways.

There are all sorts of good socio-economic reasons why that might happen and so over time, using your Latinism makes you powerful, and you get entrenched in the sort of systematic, bureaucratic ways of looking at the world, which enabled you to run a large show and you can see this in the Greek civilization, you can see it in Roman civilization, and you can see it happening in our own.

That's one thing.

The second thing is that it makes you feel that you understand everything.

It makes you believe that you know everything and that is a fatal flaw.

It's what used to be called hubris.

the belief that we understand everything.

Wise people tend to feel less certain the more they know.

Unfortunately, a lot of people feel that the more we discover through science, the more certain we can be.

At the end of a long lifetime of philosophizing, Montaigne said, Cusage, what do I know? And in a way, Socrates reached the same conclusion and so did the Buddha.

So not being aware of what it is you don't know is the fatal flaw and since the Enlightenment in the West, and possibly since the beginning of the sort of logical rationalisations that began with Plato, people began to feel we could control things, we could understand them eventually, and that would mean that we would have everything in our hands.

In our world, we've generated a world around us which looks awfully like the left hemisphere's world.

If it's true that the left hemisphere sees a world of highly focused but utterly fragmented and decontextualized elements which are somehow rather alien from it because it can't have the relationship with it that the right hemisphere and the right, and are deracinated and disembodied.

then you would expect, if it were in the ascendant, the world that we were living in to have these aspects, to be fragmented, to be lots of little bits that don't cohere, that are taken out of context.

I mean, look at any hour or two hours on television and the things that flash up on the screen and go away.

How decontextualized these bits of information are.

So we've generated a world around us, which is, to a large extent, virtual, which is abstracted.

The uniqueness of things has tended to be swallowed up by more and more of the general.

One sees that from every level of life, from the high street.

to what happens in government and companies where there's less and less a matter of an individual being able to contact another individual and more a logarithm or an algorithm that will sort out your problems for you using a computer or a call centre or whatever it is that doesn't respond in the way a human being would.

So you've got that kind of a world going on around you now and so when The right hemisphere looks at the world for experience.

It's getting back a lot of the left hemisphere's type of world.

It's when it looks out of the window to check on reality, which is what the right hemisphere tends to do.

It's more interested in experience than a theory about experience.

It tends to find the theory about experience embodied in the world around it.

Nice piece of research done by Marcel Kinsborne, a prominent Anglo-American neuroscientist and a Russian colleague.

They asked people to look at syllogisms with a false premise.

A syllogism is a set of propositions that lead to a conclusion and the classic one is, all men are mortal, Socrates is a man, Socrates is mortal.

It follows.

So they asked them to look at syllogisms in which one of the premises was false and the example here is, all monkeys climb trees, which is fine.

A porcupine is a monkey, which clearly is not.

A porcupine climbs trees.

Well, they asked people to look at this and they asked to answer the question, is the conclusion true? And the person with the intact brain says, well, no, it's not true because a porcupine is nothing like a monkey.

It's prickly, it runs on the ground.

But the left hemisphere, not of a different individual, but of the same person, isolated.

Answers, yes, it's true and the examiner says, but why? Don't you know a porcupine isn't a monkey? And the person says, well, yes, rather sheepishly.

So why is it true? Well, because that's what it says on this piece of paper and then when the right hemisphere of the same person is asked, is it true? It replies, this is the same person on a different occasion, but just using the right hemisphere.

Obviously it's not true.

The porcupine's nothing like a monkey.

It's wrong.

So the right hemisphere sees more of what we would normally call the experiential, the take that we would normally take on things.

You know, when asked if this is true, we would say, well, that can't be true.

It's wrong.

In a way, these are two conceptions of what truth might be.

One is what we know from everything we've learned in our lives, put together, is called experience.

The other is being true to an internally coherent system and it strikes me that in the modern world, we've moved very much towards, in the left hemisphere's point of view, many things.

But in this one, particularly, we can see it, that a theory about how things should be on paper is mistaken for the reality.

It's what we sometimes refer to as the tick box mentality, that the paperwork is all complete, so that means that the hospital is running fine and of course, unfortunately, that is not what one usually finds to be the case.

So this kind of thinking can be very misleading.

It can lead people to prioritize the virtual modelling of an economy over what their instincts and intuitions would tell them, that certain countries are different from others.

They're not, can't all be abstracted and generalized as this is a country that wants to borrow money.

They have different kinds of economies.

They have different priorities about debt and repayment and they have different work ethics perhaps.

So in general, lending to Switzerland is different from lending to, I don't know, some other country.

So That was neglected because the model said, you do this, you do that and that's one of the reasons anyway why we got into a bit of a mess in the financial crisis.

There are many others, like the erosion of trust, for example, which again is based on being able to implicitly understand and to implicitly accept the truth of somebody's commitment rather than deal in a sort of adversarial all against all.

way, which is what you end up with when you treat individuals and societies as atomistic, as separated from one another, rather than having bonds of rather difficult to define things like loyalty, which actually in the long run turn out to be extraordinarily important for survival.

So the right hemisphere, if you like, is the one that is more interested in what The combination of thinking about something with experience brings it's not something it's not about giving in to one's emotions or something like that, nor even to any old intuition, but well-groomed intuitions, intuitions in a mind that has been used to reasoning well.

are better than intuitions in a mind that hasn't and equally, reasoning in the mind of somebody who knows how to use intuition is going to be better than reasoning in the mind of somebody who doesn't, and who treats it as a purely mechanical, rationalizing, number-crunching process the way a machine would.

Reason, as it used to be valued, is something we seem to have lost the art of, because we no longer see the need to bring together two things that are often difficult to reconcile, which are what an internal theory, the internal consistency of a theory would dictate with what experience tells us.

The role of the left hemisphere is very important.

It's important in creation as well.

It plays a key role.

It's just it mustn't be where the whole thing ends.

Bruce: I've always wondered what you think a world where...

Is there such a thing? Has there ever been a time in history where We've been the other way, where the right hemisphere has been dominant.

Is that something that you think is...

Ian: I don't think so, because there is a difference between the way each hemisphere, not only is there a difference between the way the hemispheres look at the world at large, but there's a difference in the way they look at their relationship, which is why my book is called The Master and His Emissary.

The idea there is that the master is a wise spiritual master who looks after a small community so well that it flourishes and grows, and he realises after a while that he can't look after all the business of his people.

But he realises something more important, which is that he not only can't physically do it, but that he shouldn't get involved with certain things if he's to preserve his overall ability to understand what's going on, the whole picture and so he delegates his brightest and best messenger, if you like, to go about on his behalf, his emissary, to do his local business and this emissary is a sort of, you know, very bright chap who's aware how bright he is, and he feels he's doing all the hard work while the master's sitting at home, seraphically smiling, sitting on his backside.

You think, what does he know? The trouble is, the emissary doesn't know what it is he doesn't know.

It's a bit like the story of The Sorcerer's Apprentice and The point, so what happens, just to finish this little fable which I take from Nietzsche, is that the emissary takes on himself the master's cloak, and as a result, the master, the emissary, and the whole community fail.

Bruce: Because it doesn't have the understanding.

Ian: Of the bigger picture.

Exactly.

Now, the thing, the reason I mention that here is that The master understood that he needed an emissary.

He understood the whole thing and he thought, you go and do that, report back to me.

So the normal thing is, the master sees something, tells the emissary to go and do it.

The emissary brings back the information.

This is reincorporated into the master's overall view of things, into what one might call wisdom.

But the trouble is that the left hemisphere doesn't seem to be aware of the need for the master, for the right hemisphere.

It thinks, I know everything, I don't need to report back.

But there is evidence that the way the brain works best is by the whole picture being grasped, then by bits that are of interest being focused on and dealt with in a way that is very important and helpful by the left hemisphere.

Things are unpacked, you know, the implicit is made explicit, things are systematized more, and this is like the unfolding of something into its full the full picture, which is wonderful.

It's necessary and then that information in turn needs to be reintegrated into the whole.

Now, that's the bit of this process that we're missing.

Now, when I say the left hemisphere doesn't understand this, you might think, that's surely got to be metaphorical.

You can't mean that the left hemisphere doesn't really understand this.

But there are literally ways in which one can see this neurologically happening.

So, for example, The left hemisphere on its own is quite unaware of its own incapacities compared with the right hemisphere on its own.

So when somebody has a stroke affecting their right hemisphere, their left hemisphere functioning alone is blithely unaware of its limitations, which is why sometimes such people are very difficult to rehabilitate, because they're not aware they've got limitations.

The person who has the left hemisphere stroke and whose right hemisphere is intact is all too aware and devastated and a very nice study, which was done some years ago now, before surgery, sometimes surgeons isolate 1 hemisphere at a time, which you can do chemically for about 15 to 20 minutes, just to see which one controls speech.

Because while in there, in the brain, it's useful to know the areas to be careful of, is speech in this temporal lobe or the other one and some clever neuropsychologists thought, here's an opportunity to find out more about one of these hemispheres and how it thinks.

So it gave the person a personality inventory to do and it gave the personality inventory also to the person's friends and family to complete and it did this to the left hemisphere and the right hemisphere separately and afterwards, it became clear that the left hemisphere had a very highly polished idea of its own virtues.

compared with what other people thought.

Whereas the right hemisphere was more in keeping with reality, but a little bit on the negative side, a little bit tarnished, if you like and so, again, it's not aware and this can be very dramatic.

So, you know, somebody who's got a side of the body that's paralysed, the left side of their body is not working well.

because they've had a right hemisphere stroke.

You come and see them on the ward in the morning and say, How are you doing? And they say, Fine, thank you and you say, Oh, that's very good.

No problems then? No, Any problems, say, with your left arm? No, none at all.

Okay.

Well, would you mind just moving it for me? And they go, There, you see? And you say, Well, I didn't see it move.

I said, Well, I did.

So if you bring it right round in front of them and then say, now move that, they go, oh, that? That's not my arm.

That belongs to the bloke in the next bed.

These are not mad people.

These are not psychotic.

They're not out of touch with reality.

They're just, the right hemisphere is not functioning and they're not aware of limitations.

They're not aware of what it is they can't do.

Bruce: Do you think there was a time Because I know that in your book you talk a lot about different periods in recent histories, cultural history and the Western civilization.

But my own personal interest is indigenous people, people living in a time kind of before we came together in the largest civilized masses.

What's your understanding of people, for example, I've just been living with hunter-gatherers.

you could say in a time where they don't have to think about the future in the past in the same way that we are very preoccupied now.

Can you see your model fitting in their lives that gives you some more insight into it.

Ian: Well, that's a very interesting question.

I don't think it would be right to say that such people are...

examples of people working sort of largely with their right hemisphere and not with their left.

Because as I wanted to point out, although the left hemisphere is exclusive of the right, the right isn't of the left and people say...

Bruce: It's very generous of the left.

It is the left.

Ian: If you like to humanise them in that way, then you would say it was generous.

I mean, obviously it can't be generous, but yes.

So, but the people say you've described what a left hemisphere-dominated society would look like.

What would a right hemisphere-dominated society look like then? And the answer to that is very balanced, because as I say, the right hemisphere understands the need for one balance.

So one of the differences, it wants to balance the right, the left hemisphere is more interested in control and coercion or in competition rather than in cooperation and interestingly, the parts of the brain that help us cooperate socially make us the social animal, as Aristotle called us, the defining quality of the human was zoon political, which doesn't mean the political animal, it means the social animal.

they are in the right hemisphere largely.

They're largely underwritten by the right frontal expansion.

So that is interesting.

But I wouldn't say that that's what's going on with the hunter-gatherers.

Not really, no.

Of course, it's entirely speculative because I don't know of any brain research done on them.

People, I hope they don't get drawn in by people like me to do too much of that.

But my...

What I'm thinking there is that it's more to do with, perhaps not, I don't know, distancing themselves so much from the world, which is a frontal lobe function.

That is 1 possibility.

I really don't know.

It would be entirely speculative.

But I don't think it would be the equivalent of just being, as it were, in thrall to their right hemispheres.

I think they're more willing to listen to things that we might be aware of but rule out because they don't fit with things that we learnt, as it were, as being the case.

Bruce: You say learnt, you're talking in a conditioned way.

Ian: Yeah, no, I mean, and interestingly, children, you know, some people have claimed quite prominent figures, who you will recognise, who I mean, have claimed that, children don't have any sense of the spiritual or for the divine or anything like that.

This is something that is indoctrinated into them in school.

But actually, what we know from research on analysing language and description by children as they grow up is that young children, 4, 5, 6, naturally talk in these ways.

They talk in spiritually connected ways, they talk of awe, they talk of a sense of something bigger, of God, of the divine, even if they don't come from religious families.

But it's then knocked out of them at school by, of course, that's silly and that's childish because science has told us it's like this.

So in fact, it's the opposite that happens.

Bruce: Some of these technologies that I've been experiencing, for example, having just been in India, with Kumbh Mela, with people who are meditating, with people who are going through strong periods of abstinence and stuff, in order to try, in their words, to have a stronger connection with the divine.

Do you think that some of these technologies that some spiritual traditions have discovered may be in some way quite good at rebalancing?

Ian: Absolutely.

I think that things like mindfulness, which is an oriental spiritual practice, and indeed meditation of many kinds, aims, as does music, and poetry and ritual to engage us somewhere beyond the rationalisations that we put on, very much at the top level, on the surface of life.

Which is why they also work very well in therapy, and particularly with highly articulate people.

So, you know, extremely articulate lawyers, are exactly the people that you don't want to give a talking therapy to.

You want them to go and do art therapy, and they say things like, oh, art therapy, I've never been any good at art, it doesn't matter.

They go and do this thing, and after they've done it a few times, you see them again, and they say, that art therapy, completely amazing.

I don't know where it came from, but something...

Or we give them, or we get them to start doing mindfulness and because they're so used to an internal stream of chatter and of verbalizing, skilling that, which is what

it's about, stopping making judgments, just being present, re-engages what I would call the consciousness of the right hemisphere.

There's a great American neurologist, neuroscientist called Elkin and Goldberg, whose major contribution, I think, is that he discovered through some really lovely research that everything, when it is new, is first, as it were, dealt with principally by the right hemisphere and as it is turned into something familiar, that can be, oh, it's one of those.

So it's categorized, It's become already a bit of an abstraction.

It's general.

It's one of those.

The more that happens, the more it shifts over to the left hemisphere.

You can actually see this on brain imaging happening.

So the point is that the right hemisphere, having its much broader vigilance for everything that is, likely to be...

more aware of new experience because new experience is what it's on the lookout for.

The left hemisphere is already preoccupied with something it knows already about.

I know I want that, I'm getting it, I'm going for it.

The right hemisphere is, but whatever else there might be, let's have a think about that too.

Ramachandran, a great man, calls the right hemisphere the devil's advocate because it's on the lookout for whatever doesn't fit our preconceptions.

So the new in experience, after all, comes from the periphery of attention.

Usually, anything that's entering our field of attention is likely to do so from the periphery and the periphery is what the right hemisphere is able to take in.

The left hemisphere has a very narrow beam tension.

So it's not surprising that new experience, when it's first fresh to us, before we've conceptualized it, is more present to the right hemisphere than it is to the left.

That's what I'm saying.

Now, if that is the case, The thing that is presencing, or coming into presence for us, that is present literally before we've done much with it, is more what the right hemisphere sees.

What the left hemisphere sees is something that is represented, which literally means re-presented.

It's not in the present now, it's become the present a second time now.

We're bringing it back as one of those.

Now, if that is the case, you would expect meditation and you would expect mindfulness, which is entirely the process of emptying your mind of chatter, of judgment, and being in the moment without deciding, oh, it's one of those and I wish it would go away, or just accepting everything that is and being aware of yourself, embodied, physically, here, now, in this moment of time.

That should be a right hemisphere function.

It should, if I'm right, it should be engaging the right hemisphere.

Now, since my book was published, some wonderful research has been done on mindfulness, which demonstrates, actually, that it does engage widely distributed networks largely in the right hemisphere.

So that is right.

So I would see these religious practices, along with things like ritual, dance, music, and poetry, as all things that humans have developed to enable them to be more in touch again with a world that their left hemisphere is constantly, for good reasons of its own and very important and necessary reasons, making us alien from.

One of the interesting things is that actually when people enter a blissful state, what we seem to find is that there's enormous activity in the left frontal lobe, which is quite interesting.

One of the possible explanations for that is that the role of the frontal lobes is to suppress activity in the posterior cortex of the same hemisphere largely.

So what may be happening here is repress of the chatter of the language centres of the repression of that is necessary to achieve it.

But it's also possible the left hemisphere generally has a relationship with positive emotions.

of, as I say, it has a very positive view about itself, an unrealistically optimistic view about the future and I don't know whether these blissful states that are entered have spiritual value.

I mean, they may or they may not.

It's not my job to say.

But I think the jury is open.

They may be very fine experiences.

They may be exciting experiences.

What I do know is that a lot of the great saints and mystics have not valued them very highly.

They've said, well, it's interesting when you do, it's not like St.

Theresa, when she levitated, apparently she asked the nurse to hold her down so that she could get on with her knitting.

She didn't think it was terribly important.

If you had these experiences, that was fine.

But they weren't the be all and end all.

But then in the end, the end of this process, this comes back to the ordinary business of life.

What I love about enlightenment is the saying, I'm sure you will know, before enlightenment, chopping wood, carrying water.

After enlightenment, chopping wood, carrying water.

What matters, surely, is not what you do, but the frame of mind in which you're doing it, which is really comes back to what I'm talking about, because actually the difference between the hemispheres is a frame of mind.

It's a disposition towards the world.

One finds the spiritual through the material, not by trying to abstract yourself as far as possible from the material.

You find timelessness within time, not by somehow trying to outdo time.

you find the general through the particular, not by abandoning the examination of the particular.

These are insights that are hard to articulate to a modern audience, partly because of the way our language is.

It sounds like it's contradictory, what I'm saying.

But it's certainly what a lot of great philosophers, what Goethe, for example, very much believed and it's also what I think a lot of the distillation of spiritual traditions of wisdom have taught.

So I don't think that one necessarily, I think the end of the journey, you might be, I think when people go off looking for special experiences and so on, that may be the end of the journey for them and it may be very fulfilling and I, you know, I can't, it's really not for me to be laying down the law about, I'm too ignorant about what, you know, what is valuable and what isn't.

But I am interested in the idea, because it's one that keeps coming up, that at the end of the day, a lot of these people come back from their peregrinations to join ordinary workaday everyday life and chopping wood and carrying water.

But now it's transformed, not because it is any different, but because they are different because of where they have been and so I think the idea of a pilgrimage is a brilliant idea because the pilgrimage isn't something that ends your life.

You don't go on the pilgrimage and then commit suicide or die.

You go on the pilgrimage in order to return to the world and you go on a retreat from life in order the better to join it again and it's again a little bit like the story I tell about how things sometimes need to go away in the other direction towards what the left hemisphere can tell us.

in order to be incorporated into that picture.

The key thing here is that these things that are opposite, light and dark and silence and sound, mutually arise.

They give meaning to one another, they give existence to one another.

That was a perception that we had in the era before the so-called presocratics, before Plato.

It's something that Western philosophy then, lost, but Oriental philosophy has maintained, the coming together of opposites.

It was something that in the Renaissance people started to discover, but then with the Enlightenment, which was a very rationalistic programme, a very fine programme for achieving many good things in which we are all the grateful heirs.

But nonetheless, a hubristic movement, my only problem with it is I love the Enlightenment, and I love the architecture it gave us, the thought it gave us, and the

technology, and the people were, some of the great minds of the Enlightenment were some of the great people who ever lived.

But they also came from a place where they were pretty much still historically grounded in something else.

But the heirs of the Enlightenment have just taken this rationalistic frame, and this will solve everything.

But it will drive all the meaning out of being.

what are we here for? These seem to be the important questions.

What are we here for? What is the meaning of a good life? The longer one lives, these things that sound so banal, so simple, have a more and more resonant meaning for me.

I think one should...

One should keep a reasonably open mind, but not an open mind or just any old thing.

But there are more things in heaven and earth than we know of and I don't think that we know by any means, I think it would be stupid to suggest we know everything about what our brains are capable of or everything that consciousness gives us and one very commonsensical way of thinking about that is that we know very well, and this is extremely down to earth stuff, that if you are not expecting to see something, you won't see it and that and there are wonderful, vivid demonstrations of this.

The most famous one probably is gorillas in our midst, which you must know about.

But if you're not expecting something, you can miss the most blatant thing that's happening, because it's not part of your lot to be looking for that.

Also, if we don't normally formulate things in certain ways, we've got a preconception about what's going to happen, then we formulate everything that comes along according to the way we've preconceived.

So while on the whole it's terribly important to stick to, because otherwise what are our bearings, to stick to reasonable bases for judging phenomena which are in keeping with other things we know, and there's a coherent, in other words, body of knowledge, it shouldn't be so fossilized, that we rule out, that we may be missing something.

So one has to do, as always in life, a finessing act of keeping somewhere between a closed mind and a true open mind.

That's all I would say about it and if it is true that by not attending to things, you lose the habit of seeing them, not expecting things, you simply don't notice them, When some peoples say that they hear things or see things that we just say, I can't, one explanation may be that because they have not ruled these things out and been made to rule them out by their culture, they actually are seeing and hearing things we don't.

I mean, it's perfectly possible.

Another possibility is that they're expressing themselves in a way which is figurative and And we're perhaps taking it literally.

But then even what figurative means and what literal means is an interesting, because that may be a distinction that we've got over here in the West.

It is possible to too sharply demarcate things.

One should be as clear about things as the data permit, and no clearer, in my view.

So clarity is a wonderful thing, but clarity to a sort of false clarity that, oh yes, we've got that one now, is an illusion.

The belief that we can see things clearly can itself be a dangerous illusion.

You see, there is actually no such thing as seeing something clearly.

It was a point Ruskin made, actually, a rather brilliant point.

If you are half a mile away, a quarter of a mile away, you can't tell whether that white square on a lawn is an open book or a handkerchief.

As you get closer, you see it's a book, but you don't know what the book is.

As you get closer still, you see what the book is, and you may be able to read it.

But then, have you seen the book clearly? If you look closer, you will see that what you think are letters are actually discontinuous splodges on a piece of texture that has hills and veils in it and if you take a microscope to it, you will see that there are little fibrils on it and if Ruskin had an electron microscope, he might have found that it was composed of largely nothing at all.

Now, at which level of closeness and conciseness and precision Is it that one sees the book clearly? You tell me.

What does it mean? When we say we see that book clearly, what one means is I see clearly that it is a book.

Clarity is not an aspect of perception.

It's an aspect of our thinking, of pigeonholing.

Oh yes, it's clearly one of those.

Now, if we are going to deal with things that we haven't yet got a pigeonhole for, Shoving them into a pigeonhole prematurely, although it is neat and therefore clear and precise in that sense, may do travesty to what it is.

Some things are inherently not susceptible to neat pigeonholing, and the attempt to neatly pigeonhole them may destroy them, make them no longer available for inspection.

That's not a plea for woolly-mindedness.

It's not a plea for stopping being as precise as one can be.

It's not, above all, a plea for talking in sloppy terms.

I am a great fan of being clear and being analytic where it is appropriate to be analytic.

But sometimes it is not appropriate.

Sometimes you will not achieve better understanding by simply going on doing more of that.

You need to mix it with something else.

Now that is what That analytic belief that we have it clear is what one bit of our brain is telling us, the articulate part is telling us that and there are lots of voices in our culture that reinforce that and it is a partial truth.

I'm not saying it's false.

It is a partial truth.

Bruce: When I have been with some indigenous groups, and especially, again, if I'm taking some part in a ritual where they may use some substance, I see things.

in a very, very different way.

I mean, I'm still seeing the world, but I'm seeing it in a very much more vivid way.

Also, sometimes when I've been in a more meditative state, not in a classical meditation, but perhaps walking, and I get a sense of perceiving things slightly more richly and deeply.

Do you think that these are things that are always there except that we are filtering them out in some way, as Huxley said, or was...

Ian: Well, what is there? I mean, there's obviously, apart from saying there is something there, which is not generated by me, we can't know, obviously, what it is without getting into the picture by the fact of knowing it.

We know it only as we know it, so we can't know what it's like when we don't know it.

It's like trying to look at what you look like when nobody's looking at it.

Bruce: Yeah, but we are aware that there are...

that our senses are only receiving within a bandwidth, for example, of light, of sensation in many different ways, and there are some ways that are travelling straight through us, and we don't think that we're actually picking up on them at all and yet at the same time, perhaps in some intuitive way, or we call it intuitive, but in some extra-sensory way, we are actually experiencing information through our stomach that we don't think we have any senses, but we are.

All of these things could be a part of how we're living in the world.

Ian: Absolutely.

I couldn't agree more and for example, when one's depressed, which is something I have experience of, it is actually the case that the world looks drained of colour and when you recover from depression, one of the things that people describe, and I felt it myself, is the colour comes back.

Now, how do you explain that? And what is actually happening? I mean, of course, it's not true that when you're depressed, you can't discriminate.

If you were asked, you know, is this green or is it red? But the whole perception is different and people in different cultures do perceive things differently.

We know this, for example, from some interesting research done on differences between Far Eastern peoples and Westerners, on how they actually literally perceive a picture.

So what do they report having seen? And there are consistent differences.

Westerners tend to focus on a prominent feature and ignore the ground, if you like.

The figure stands out very much from the ground.

They don't notice the ground or recognise the ground.

compared with Far Easterners, Chinese, Korean and Japanese people, who tend to see more that feature within the context of the background.

So they'll report more of that and be less impressed by the thing that we had focused on.

So they're actually perceiving things differently, clearly.

It doesn't mean to say that they're physically incapable of seeing something.

I'm talking about attention.

Bruce: Yes.

Ian: It's like attentional blindness.

It's not that you literally don't, your eyes don't pick it up or you're literally blind to it.

It's all going in there somewhere.

But you're not attending to it.

It's about attention.

It's all about what you attend to, how you attend.

If you attend differently, you see the world differently and the single biggest difference between the two hemispheres is their mode of attention.

Any psychiatrist will know that feelings are experienced in, for example, depression is often experienced around here, slightly below the heart.

There's a very heavy feeling in the heart.

It's not really about your breathing or anything like that and it's not that, you know, as far as we know, your heart's doing anything wrong.

It's that there is a feeling there and you can feel things in your stomach if you're anxious and people report, of course, changes, demonstrable changes in what happens in their guts, in their hearts and everything we think, everything we feel changes our whole physiological system.

Our blood pressure changes, our heart rate changes, our breathing changes, gut changes and these things also feed back to the brain.

It's not a one-way traffic that the brain, like some controller, is telling them what to do.

That's part of the story, but they're also feeding information back to the brain and so the idea that our thinking and feeling is simply going on up here is wrong.

It's going on with the whole embodied person again.

It's not just a disembodied mind.

We are our whole selves.

People think that when I'm saying that we're beginning to lose the capacity to understand the world, to attend to the world in the way the right hemisphere does, they think I'm just talking in some metaphor that there's nothing to do with what's actually happening in the brain.

But I was talking in Toronto a year ago and after I talked, a woman came up to the microphone and she said, I teach 5 to 7 year olds and what my colleagues and I have noticed in the last few years is that we're actually having to start to teach children how to read the human face.

Now I was shocked, I don't know how you feel about that, but if it's come to the point where we actually need explicitly to teach people about something so intuitive and implicit as how to understand a face, We are changing what it means to be a human being because that is at the core and until recently, the only children that would have to have been taught would have been quite severely autistic children.

Put that together with emails I've received from teachers all over the world who don't know one another, but a frequent e-mail I've had has been from a teacher saying, I wonder if this is of relevance.

Over the last few years, I've noticed Something I've been giving my class for 30 years, and I can only remember one person who couldn't do it.

The last few years, I'm finding that 30 to 40% of the class can't do it.

What is it? It's a task of sustained attention and if you put that together with research that suggests that children are less empathic now than they used to be, you've got three things that if you wanted to characterise very briefly and sketchily, a difference.

classic difference between the right hemisphere and the left hemisphere.

What is the right hemisphere classically better at? Sustaining attention, reading faces, and empathy.

So it seems that we are switching those things off.

Now in your, the societies you've been to, I would imagine there are practices that are to do with sustaining attention and that the reading of faces and body language is as important as any kind of verbalizing and that empathy is a very important part of how a community works.

Now, I don't mean to say that means that all their practices will be practices that we would think of as kind and tolerant in an 18th century sort of a way, as the Enlightenment would see it.

Very likely some of them are not.

But that is different from a sense of empathy and an empathy with one another and with the world, with nature, with what is around us.

How extraordinary that we now think of ourselves as separate from nature.

You know, nature is something out there, we are here, but we are as much an excrescence of nature as a plant or an animal or anything else and I would go further than that and say, We're part of the whole thing, including the mountains and the rivers and the seas.

People talk about the problem of consciousness and I say, well, first of all...

Bruce: The problem being that they can't ascertain...

Ian: Can't ascertain what the Dickens it is and I say, well, what about the problem of matter? Consciousness is something we all, at least, have...

experience of, we're inside of it, and so forth.

But what is matter? Matter is some form of consciousness that resists me.

All I can say is that when I push that thing, apparently my will is thwarted.

Consciousness is something that pushes back.

Sorry, matter is something.

Matter is something that pushes back and it may be that consciousness has phases, and I don't mean temporal phases, phases in time.

I mean phases in the way chemists talk about substances in different phases.

So for example, water is in the solid phase when it's ice, in the liquid phase when it's running water, and then in the gaseous phase when it's water vapour and maybe consciousness, it's still water.

Maybe consciousness has phases.

Maybe in some it's very rarefied.

Maybe in some it flows.

Maybe in some it's static and in those ones you wouldn't find what we call consciousness.

But the Buddhist idea that the whole universe is a conscious being that we respond to and it responds to us may have a deep meaning.

I happen to like that idea very much.

I think the idea that there is a something out there that just exists entirely separate from us doesn't add up to anything we know.

Everything that we do know seems to be responsive to us and to require our participation in coming into being.

I mean, in a way, we couldn't know it without that happening and the way in which we encounter it changes what it is we find, so that one person encounters it in a certain spirit and finds only this, somebody else encounters it in another spirit and finds something else.

So There's something that is responsive to us, and if we give to it and encourage it, gives more to us.

That's really what these practices that we're talking about are about, that the world changes in response to how we treat it.

We treat it in a certain way, in a certain disposition, a certain spirit.

We find the world to be a certain kind of place.

This is a very, very down to earth reality for a psychiatrist, or for any living human being.

Some days I will think, Why am I blue today? What's gone wrong? Absolutely nothing.

It's the same world it was yesterday, and it's the same world that it will be tomorrow and the next day I feel on top of the world.

What has changed? Nothing.

I mean, objectively, what has changed is my, something in me has changed.

My disposition towards the world has changed and we can choose to make the world a grim, awful place, or we can choose to make the world a place which is life-enhancing and for which we can only feel a sort of sense of gratitude to be sharing in it.

So that depends on us and so we, it seems to me, we have a relationship with whatever it is apart from ourselves.

That's the basis of things and we certainly depend on it.

But it may depend on us and that's been a mystical perception that goes back a long way.

Meister Eckhart in the Middle Ages, a German mystic I'm sure you know of, said that God needs our love every bit as much as we need His, and that God depends on us in the way that we depend on Him or it.

Now, whatever your religious beliefs are, and I'm not a paid-up member of any particular denomination, I do think that I don't know everything, and I do think that there's something bigger and beyond just what I know.

I think that's only a reasonable position, actually, in life.

It would be extraordinary if our brains were conditioned to understand everything in the universe.

That would be a rather irrational assumption.

So I am certain there are things beyond what I understand and they seem to me to be living.

They seem to me to have the quality of life about them, to be responsive, in other words, not to be inert, not to be beyond our call, and not to be unchanging and it may be very important that we respond to the world in a certain way.

It may be as important to whatever it is apart from us that we play our part by responding in a certain way as it is to our lives.

what we get out of it, that we see the world in a certain way.

That is a personal philosophy.

It's purely speculative.

It's based only on experience and reading other people's best thoughts on it.

But what I am certain about is that it's not about something away and beyond.

The divine, whatever it is, not something remote and far away.

There's a fantastic saying of He says somewhere, people think of the divine as remote and alien, but it is by all, he says, by all possible means, the divine assails us and penetrates us.

We live steeped in its burning layers.

Is that extraordinary? Yeah and that actually, those words, as soon as I read them, they went very much into my mind as a sort of, yes, that answer to my experience.

We live steeped in its burning layers.

That seems to me right and often that means it's going to be painful and often it means it's going to be dark.

It's never going to be just enlightenment.

Because that would be untrue to anything that we know.

Nothing is unmixed.

Nothing is unmixed.

You have to take the good with the bad.

The web of our life is of mingled yarn, good and ill together.

We need boundaries and we need distance, what I call in my book necessary distance in order to connect.

If you're too close to something, you can't connect with it because you're fused with it.

Bruce: Which is what also you described in some of your talks about, being able to step back and be the observer.

That allows you to the empathy or the Machiavellian.

Ian: It can lead to a cold clinical detachment in which one is no longer connected.

Bruce: You can use that as a force.

Ian: You can use it as a force for control.

But you can also, very importantly, it can be the beginnings of insight, empathy and a connection.

in many ways, the business of creation, which is about individuals coming into being rather than an amorphous mass, is, the trouble with religions that say all is 1 and end of story, as far as I'm concerned, is, well, that's fine, but it's a bit like my problem.

Bruce: It's not very intuitive either.

Ian: Well, it's not very intuitive either.

But also, it's a bit like saying, it's a bit, it's really the sort of flip side of when a materialist just say, well, all there is is matter.

Bruce: Yes.

Ian: You know, in consciousness, it's just a mistake.

But It seems to me that if there's anything that we have to try and reconcile, it's that there is consciousness and there is matter, and it's not going to be easy reconciling them and being easy with holding things that are hard to reconcile, but holding them both and not giving them up may be one strand in progress towards the wisdom and it may also apply to the business of the one and the many.

It may be just as true that there are many as that there are one and it may be that we have to hold both those things together, because creation has gone to quite a lot of trouble to differentiate, it seems to me and it's a point, not original to me, but I think I first know it from Iris Murdoch, that when God created the world in the Genesis myth, He divided the light from the dark.

He divided the sea from the dry land and he divided up and created a multiple and wonderfully rich creation.

So the process of creation is about differentiation within union, but not differentiation that atomizes.

So there needs to be a union that as far as possible differentiated within while holding that together.

So it's all about the tension between union and division.

But ultimately, they need to be held together.

There needs to be a union at a higher level of union and division.

Heraclitus said, war is the father of all things, by which he meant this contrariness and opposition is out of which everything arises.

Really, he was perceiving what Hegel then saw at the beginning of the 19th century.

But I would say if war is the father of all things, and war is king and father of all things, then peace is queen and mother of all things and you need both of these things.

You need war and peace.

You need conflict and union.

You need division and the coming together into the whole and you can't simplify this, and you can't make life easy by saying you only need one of these and I distrust any tradition that tries to cut that Gordian knot that simply.

Coming to terms with one's dark side is a good example of the need for the opposites.

I mean, a lot of the problems that I think that individuals have that come to see me as a psychiatrist, but also perhaps some of the ills more generally of our society are the inability to see that there is a dark side to everything.

There is nothing that is just all good news.

It doesn't matter how good your idea is, it doesn't matter how brilliant your goal or your value is, it has its downside and accepting that is really, really important and for a human being to be at ease with the fact that, yes, they have this, it doesn't mean to say you condone it, doesn't mean to say that you nurture it, means to say that you accept that it's part of the business of being a human being and you may not like it, but A good place for starting tackling it is recognizing it exists, denying its existence leads to all sorts of problems.

So the recognition of opposition and tension within the whole is very important.

But also you said the wave that is part of...

Now, that is different and that is a very good image because the wave is sufficiently differentiated, if you like, from the mass of the water.

A wave is an entity.

But it is actually also entirely continuous with the sea as a whole with the main and there are various conditions that must be right, the wind and the tides and so on, that cause these waves and so, but if that wave hadn't existed, then another wave might have existed.

But that wave actually adds to the part of the action of the sea.

It may be part of what actually results eventually in there being the erosion of a cliff.

It plays its part.

It differentially existed, but it has gone back into the main.

Now, a human life may be like that.

It never loses its touch with whatever else there is.

But at a moment in time, it is more formed than it is later when it...

Bruce: Whenever I have had the courage to actually look at those aspects of myself that I have had problems with, I've generally found, although there are many, many more to find and to uncover, I've generally found that by giving them attention and trying to understand them in some way, that they have actually dissipated into something much more positive and so I haven't had to deal with anything so far.

Maybe I'm just very fortuitous with a beautiful upbringing or whatever it is that has come about, that actually when I have concentrated on the dark, it has dissipated.

But you said that perhaps that's not the case and that there is dark and we just have to accept it.

Ian: Well, I think there is dark and one has to accept it.

But I think whether it's has power depends on whether you accept it or not.

If you accept it, you rob it of a lot of its power.

It seems to me the more you resist, not in the sense of the more you resist doing things you dislike and think are wrong, I'm not in favour of giving up on that struggle.

But I mean that's something different.

You only engage in that struggle to the extent that you accept that darkness is there.

But it is real.

I mean, I'm not...

look, when I say all these things, how do I know? I haven't a clue.

I'm just a bloke sitting here talking to you.

Do you know a lot more than me? Well, no.

I mean, in the end, none of us knows anything about these big, you know, and neither I nor you nor Richard Dawkins nor the Pope know, do you know what I mean, know the answers to these questions? There just is no, it's a mistake to think that we could possibly have the...

the data to come to a conclusion.

It's all about hunches based on living and one of my hunches is that evil exists.

I mean, you know, one of the things that I dislike in the Christian tradition is the idea that in order to sort of keep God nice and clean, there isn't really any evil anywhere.

It's all just lack of good, you know, in some sort of negative way.

I'm more interested in...

come over time to rather admire the Hindu idea that right in the heart of creation there is also destruction and that, again, opposites cohere and that the creator and the destroyer may be phases, which is interesting and certainly being less speculative, but still I'm afraid in the realms of speculation.

But if you ask me my experience, I would say that I think I've seen evil things done and I think I've met people who, okay, one can say in this formula, beloved, of the profession, there is no such thing as an evil person, there are only evil acts.

But yeah, hey, but what does one mean by an evil person? Is it a person who does evil acts? Or one really a good person is a person who does good acts? But I mean,

perhaps there is a distinction to be made, I don't want to get hung up on it, but the point is that I think that I've met people who I can say, have a positive lust for evil, for destroying, for hurting, maximally.

But I think what I'm really saying is that I don't think that one can just say that there's a failure to sort of get to grips with being good.

There is a positive something there, which is thoroughly exhilarated by and enjoying the sheer awfulness of something and there may be a little bit of that in every person.

I think Montesquieu, it was said, nothing pleases us so much as the troubles of our friends.

This is a slightly grim.

Bruce: And obviously a good friend to have.

Ian: Yeah, well, I don't know, because of course, one is genuinely grieved by such things, but I suppose we all like to know that other people have to put up with the **** that we put up with.

I think that's different, of course, though, from that sort of, that's nothing to do with what I'm talking about.

I'm really more talking about a sort of thing that gets a life of its own.

and actually enjoys the press.

I mean, it's very difficult to encounter the Nazi killing machine and some of the other killing machines and one feels a sort of chill in reading some of the documents and realising the enthusiasm with which people looked into sort of aspects of this, which one can only see as thoroughly obscene.

It sort of has a complete life of its own and one can start saying, oh, poor chap, he had a sort of missing father, or, you know, I think, you know, There's more, again, than the modern Western, liberal, humane, you know, vision of the world, we haven't got it all sewn up.

Bruce: Many, many things have come much better for us as human beings on this planet, and statistics can show that again and again and again.

But I also, my own intuitive feeling is that there's something, we've taken the wrong track and we're missing a number of things that would make our lives much more harmonious and the only reason I can say that so fervently is because of my immense privilege of having lived with indigenous peoples and some of them do really show some egalitarian traits and I know, I mean, one of the problems I'm having with being on this journey of mine is that I venture into romanticisms quite fast and when I lived with tribal people working with the BBC, I was so scared of entering into that sort of noble savage Russo, that we're good at the base of it all and that innate positivity and so I didn't go there because I didn't want to be vilified by the academic world and it was...

something I was terrified of.

But when I've actually sat back and I've really analysed and I've really spent time, and admittedly it's only a short period of time and I'm not an expert, I'm not speaking the language, and so I can't really tell.

But the sensations that I have in the company of some of those communities is incredibly positive.

Ian: I don't think you should discount them.

Bruce: No, thank you and I don't.

I mean, in a way, that's what this journey's about.

It's like...

It's about many things, but there's one or two groups that we're going to go and live with later on, maybe this summer if I'm lucky enough to get invited and I can raise the money and these things and I will not get an answer, but perhaps if I can take a camera and we can go with these thoughts in mind about how seeing how societies can interact and it's not about turning back the clock, and it's not about looking at them as if they are indicative of how we all were, because I think even that's dangerous.

They're modern people in their own right.

But as an indication of what our human potential is, and how perhaps we can overcome some of our stuff, I don't know.

The other thing that's really been evident for me is when the coggy asked me to give up sex and these other things.

I had no idea just the level to which the conditioning that I'd received in my life had gone.

I thought sex is just a natural thing.

Why would you give that up? I'm just a red-blooded guy like anyone else.

But removed that from my life, and I realized how controlled I was by these forces within me, which only later, I mean, I'm talking a year later, I suddenly was beginning to have experiences from different parts of my body that were...

They were completely alien to me, that I had no idea was even possible and suddenly it just made me realise that maybe I don't know what the natural state is.

It's not for me to guess, I mean, to judge that.

All I know is that by removing something from my life, something else came in and it gave me an...

an understanding about myself that felt much more natural, felt much more real and that's kind of part of my journey to look at, to spend time with indigenous people and spend time with people like you and all these great minds is to try and make sense of that.

Ian: Yeah, well, I mean, absence is, you know, clearly part of many spiritual traditions and there's presumably a good reason why that is the case and I'm sure you're right, that in many ways it's another aspect of you can't have everything.

That there are downsides to everything.

It's not good or bad.

It just is going to be different.

A life with interesting, loving sexual content is marvellous.

A life without it shows you other things and it's really...

I'm reminded, I mean, God, I would be, wouldn't I? But I'm reminded of Heidegger, you know, that truth is a partial unveiling that also contains another untruth.

You know, that what you're doing is seeing an aspect of something.

A truth is never final and the revealing of 1 aspect of truth is at the same time a concealing of another aspect and so you can't have everything and I guess that what is being asked of you is to do something very different from something you're already pretty well versed in and other things will stand forward when you do that.

Whether you really need to spend the rest of your life in darkness in a cave without any...

No, However, I think having a bit of it in one's life is rather good.

I mean, from the sublime to the ridiculous and I'm sorry to bring things down to such a terribly basic level.

But I have myself recently started a diet which is now very popular, which is called the fast diet, where you spend one, well, two days a week, and I am at the moment spending two days a week, but I'm hoping in the long run it can be one day a week, fasting basically and the payoff of this is that you can eat what you like the other five or six days and at the moment I'm finding it very manageable.

Bruce: It's also brilliant neurologically.

It's great for heart disease and...

Ian: It's good for all sorts of things.

Cancers, many things.

I'm not here to do an ad for it.

Bruce: No, but I've heard the same.

I tried to do it too.

I found it hard.

Ian: Did you?

Bruce: Yeah.

Ian: You're not absolutely fasting.

I mean, you have 600 calories, which I find manageable and also because it's Lent, I happened to have given that.

Bruce: Sure.

Ian: So I can see the point of these things and certainly it's true that when you don't do something, not only do you feel different and see things differently, but also that you really value very much those.

I mean, I know it sounds a bit negative to put it that way, like banging your head against a brick wall wonderful when you leave off.

But it is also true that we don't value things when we have them all the time.

Bruce: This journey didn't start out being a spiritual one.

It kind of has come about.

that these notions of things beyond myself and the bigger picture and stuff have just sort of have crept up and I guess I should have seen it coming.

It was destined to be.

But so fasting, you've talked about, my sexual abstinence, meditation, we've talked about, all these things that there's some who might suggest that actually what's actually happening physiologically when this when we do these technologies is that we conserve some sort of energy and maybe does that energy in some way help us with this filtering?

Ian: What I would say is obviously, and you must have this in mind partly, is that certainly would be, as I understand it, a Chinese idea that, chi, you can serve chi in this way.

And, yes, prana and the notion that, I think what all these things have in common, and the idea of the Tao and so on, which I, as soon as I discovered about that, I thought, God, where has this been all my life? And it was one of those scales fall from your eyes moments.

But the fact is that they all have this image of something that flows.

I mean, that sounds, okay, it's static or it flows, what, so what? Actually, everything, is in that idea of something that flows, which is, again, coming back to Heraclitus, who famously said, everything flows.

This perception is enormously important, and that does relate to the difference between the hemispheres, because the left hemisphere doesn't seem to understand continuity of flow.

It understands a sequence of separate elements that are then stacked up, rather than the way that a digital sequence or a set of cine frames gives you the illusion of a continuity, but it's really a lot of separate things stuck together, however small.

But the concept of something that actually is continuously and flows and changes is something that the right hemisphere seems to be better at understanding.

That idea of flow, of something that flows, that is vital, gives energy and meaning to life.

and even to things that aren't apparently alive like water.

It seems quite important one.

Sure.

I wouldn't by any means want to jettison anything we've learned through Western medicine.

I think it's, in fact, Western medicine has many critics.

But I'm not really one of them.

I mean, I think that sometimes it can go terribly wrong when it thinks of the body as a machine and when its practitioners think of themselves as technicians and don't pay attention to the whole person and think it's more important to be sending for a test and tapping on the keyboard of their computer than actually relating humanly to a person in front of them and there are many problems of that kind to do with decontextualizing and so on, but it's given us a fantastic understanding of so much about ourselves and has relieved a lot of misery.

So let us be grateful for it.

But I do think that, you know, nothing is the whole story and there are aspects of Chinese medicine that we desperately need to learn from.

Not because we're going to abandon what we know in the West, but for God's sake, can't we have less of this ding-dong and more of a synthesis and the trouble is that a lot of mainstream scientists, as soon as you say anything, however yielding to any other point of view at all, other than they absolutely narrow technical mechanistic vision, they get worried that you're a flake and you're about to pollute the pristine waters of science with all sorts of gobbledygook.

But actually it's about being a little bit able to accept we don't know everything.

I mean, it seems terribly hard for some people.

Bruce: Yeah, doesn't it just?

Rupert Sheldrake

`https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mrFWlDHBA_s`

Rupert: Meanwhile, I don't know if you're aware of this, but my son Cosmo was doing anthropology at Sussex.

He's just graduated.

Okay and they had a module on ethnographic films.

Bruce: Okay (laughs).

Rupert: And you were one of the specimens.

They had to write essays analysing you in Tribe.

Bruce: Okay.

Rupert: Compared with other ethnographic films and stuff.

Bruce: Of course, we would never call us an ethnographic film.

It's an entertainment.

Rupert: Yes, well, that's it, but the point is that it was contrasting ones that did call themselves ethnographic films, and it was looking at a range of approaches to...

There's some classic one done in Canada about the Inuit in the 1920s.

Bruce: Yes, the Nook of the North, which is very famous, which is all completely set up, not ethnographic either.

Rupert: I know that was that was part of what they were doing, but here's something that looks like an early ethnographic, but actually it was all set up.

Bruce: In fact, many of them were.

Well, they used film back then, so it's much harder.

You can't get very natural actions.

Most things had to be set up.

It's so precious.

You're taking these canisters all the way to the North.

you have to have things staged and at the same time, it was still a beautiful film that really made a positive impact.

But it was contrived, you know.

Rupert: Anyway, that was one, these were all the kinds of things they were discussing.

Anyway, you, I don't know if you're aware of this, but undergraduates are sort of writing all about you.

Bruce: I hear it a few times, actually.

I hear it a few times, because we made a stir when the film came out, and then the anthropological community wanted to hate it, and then found that they couldn't hate it as much as they wanted to and they were grappling with it for ages and I think that we were very lucky.

I worked with an amazing team and we were very careful about how we went about doing things.

But of course, any time you point a camera at something, by default, you're choosing, by choosing where to put the camera, you're already manipulating the story.

Rupert: Yes.

Bruce: And so there is no such thing as a pure ethnographic film.

Rupert: No, I think that's one of the lessons that they're learning.

Bruce: Yes.

Rupert: It doesn't, there is no such thing and there's various degrees, yes, there's various degrees of contrivance and so on.

Bruce: Yeah, and if you looked at my month with the Penan people and then the hour-long film that I get, of course you're going to have a much higher percentage of high-octane moments in that hour than you would have in my month.

My month is actually often very gentle and quite...

Rupert: Well, that's true of any film or drama, isn't it?

Bruce: Of course.

Rupert: I mean, if you go to see the theatre to see a play, you don't see sort of hours of people just sitting around having breakfast or reading the paper.

Bruce: But a pure ethnographer would try, if you look at some of those films, people have really tried to get that sensation where they do allow the boredom, allow the slowness to come about, and then maybe you're able to have a slightly more visceral experience and I think in this film we're going to dabble with that a little bit.

We're starting out at the beginning very much in the head, asking questions, sort of analysing concepts and then later on, perhaps we're going to enter into a place where we can have an experience and that will need slowing down and more visual and more sort of sensual photography, I guess.

But it's a hard thing to do and you know this yourself in your own work.

Rupert: Yes, although I don't attempt to do film much.

Bruce: Could you tell us a little bit about, especially your time in India, in Hyderabad, when you were working as a plant physiologist and you came up with that very structured scientific discovery.

How was that time for you?

Rupert: Well, when I was working in Cambridge on plant development, I came to the conclusion that we simply can't understand the form of plants, how they grow, just on the basis of chemicals and DNA and genes, that something more was needed and I took up a concept that was already established in biology, morphogenetic fields, form-shaping fields.

This made a lot of sense, but then the question is, how are they inherited? And I came up with this unconventional, controversial theory of inheritance by morphic resonance.

a kind of collective memory on which each member of a species draws and to which it contributes.

I came up with that idea in Cambridge.

It didn't really fit with the kind of standard mechanistic thinking of my colleagues and the atmosphere there and I realised this was a radical break with what I'd done before, so I wanted time to think about it.

I also wanted to do something useful, and I also loved India because I'd travelled there before.

So I took a job at an international agricultural institute in Hyderabad, India, where I was doing practical work on improvement of pigeon peas and chickpeas, which are big crops there.

So I was living in India.

I was doing practical work in the field, working in villages some of the time, outdoor experiments, and thinking about morphic resonance.

I mean, that's what I did in my spare time.

So I had a very interesting experience in doing all those things, because the idea of causation across time, the kind of memory to which we tune in, is unfamiliar in the West, except perhaps through Jung's idea of the collective unconscious.

But in India, it's completely standard and so what was shockingly outrageously radical in Cambridge.

When I discussed it with my Indian colleagues, including scientific colleagues, it didn't seem to them radical at all.

They said things like, we've known that all along.

You know, what's so big and what's so new in this idea? You know, this is nothing but karma, the idea of the influence across lives and across generations and so on.

The difficulty I had in India was getting them to see that this is something that could be treated scientifically and where you could do experiments, because they thought of it as a philosophical belief system.

Bruce: Okay, well, that's a really beautiful insight into those very, very particular differences.

Could I take you back, though, one step, because you said that you came up with this radical idea while you're in Cambridge.

What were your influences? Did this just come to you one day, or was your previous trips to India an influence? How did it come about?

Rupert: Well, I think for me, I was thinking a lot about how plants grow, how form develops, why leaves are leaves and not petals, and why...

Oak trees look different from pines and so on and genes alone don't explain it.

They just give you the right chemicals, the right enzymes, the right proteins.

They don't explain shape.

So I was wrestling with this idea of morphogenetic fields and wrestling with the idea of how they can be inherited and they're not inherited through the genes, so there must be some other way and what for me was a huge breakthrough was reading a book called Matter and Memory by a French philosopher called Ori Bergson.

The book was written in the late 19th century, first translated into English in 1911 and Bergson argues that memory's not stored in the brain.

The brain's a receiver of memory, but not a store of memory and that there's another kind of causation in nature, a causation across time involved with memory.

He was originally just thinking about human memory, not nature in general.

But I realized that this idea of a memory principle that could exist different from our normal forms of causation.

could be the key to understanding a great many things in biology and that set me off thinking.

I had four or five days of kind of almost manic excitement as this idea worked through my mind and I began to see the implications and stuff.

So that was really, there was a period of sort of almost altered state of consciousness as I thought of a completely new way of seeing a lot of biological phenomena and psychological phenomena.

Bruce: And do you know much about the gentleman who wrote the book and how that was received when he did? I mean, has this always been very much outside of the scientific realm or was he more, was there a more sympathetic time in our history?

Rupert: Well, in the late 19th century, there was, I think, a greater openness to holistic thinking.

There was a big controversy within biology, there was a controversy between vitalism and mechanism.

The vitalists were saying there's something more about living organisms that's not just molecular machinery and there were philosophers who were thinking in a more holistic way.

Bergson was one of them and there were psychologists who were trying to give a broad view of the human mind.

One of them was William James in the United States.

He was much influenced by Bergson.

I would say that there was also a big interest among intellectuals and scientists in psychical research, you know, telepathy, survival of bodily death.

These were more mainstream then than they were later.

The First World War really was a kind of cut off for that line of speculation.

In the 1920s and 30s, scientific thinking became much more rigidly mechanistic.

The debate was much narrower, and the more dogmatic kind of materialistic thinking we're used to became entrenched as an orthodoxy.

Bruce: Why do you think it was during the First World War? Was there a reason that you can put your finger on?

Rupert: It's hard to know.

I mean, the First World War was a kind of watershed.

It was the end of a whole phase of civilization in the West and it led to, I think, a great restriction of what people were prepared to think about.

I don't know why.

I think it it stopped a lot of this spiritual exploration.

In the late 19th century, a lot of English intellectuals and American intellectuals got interested in theosophy, for example, which was exploring meditation, esoteric Buddhism, Hindu philosophy.

These were widely discussed.

But the First World War, I suppose partly because it just killed off so many young people and was such a horrible reality check.

After that, you either got the kind of hedonism of the 1920s, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Russian Civil War, then hyperinflation and the rise of Nazism in Germany and so the issues became much more political, much less speculative and materialism became the kind of standard default position of intellectuals, a kind of atheistic materialism.

and there was a kind of turning away from spirituality.

Now I'm not a historian, so I don't know all the reasons for that, but it had a big influence on our own culture.

Bruce: You said people had a shift, but do you think to some degree that actually the general populace hasn't shifted as much as perhaps some of the academic and the intellectual scientists who have become much more narrow-minded? When I think of the mechanistic view that Descartes came about with, for example, when he was dissecting animals and saying, don't worry, it's just the squeakings of a machine when they were crying with pain.

To the average person in the street, that seems ridiculous and there is a holistic perspective as well as a reductionist perspective.

But the scientific community seems to have just narrowed in.

Would you say that they're representative of of all of us in the West or just a small group?

Rupert: Well, I think they're representative of the mainstream of education, culture, government and business.

Because the scientific mechanistic way of thinking has become the default position of educated people, not just in the West, but in the East too.

I mean, in China and India, educated Chinese and Indians are interested in the same kind of mechanistic way of thinking is the way their business and government and scientific enterprises run and I think what's happened is that there's been a split.

It goes back much further in the West, but we've created in other cultures too, between mechanistic thinking, which operates from 9 to 5 on Mondays to Fridays for most people, and then a different, more private way of experiencing nature, That's why the great cities of the Western world are clogged with traffic on Friday afternoons as millions of people try to get back to nature in a car.

You know, there's this sense that our true selves are much more connected with nature, which is why lots of people want country cottages if they get rich and like the idea that there's a part of themselves which is connected with nature and that goes back much further in the West.

I mean, at the end of the 18th century, When mechanistic thinking, Enlightenment rationalism, was becoming the standard intellectual mindset of educated people, science and reason, in this rather mechanistic way, there was, after all, the great Romantic movement, the Romantic poets, led a kind of back to nature movement and I think what we've had since then is a kind of cultural split where during working hours we're prepared to go along with mechanistic thinking.

In our free time we think differently and most people in our culture have that split too.

Most people, if they keep a dog or a cat, know that it's not a machine.

They know it's a being with feelings and thoughts and emotions and bonds with them, often telepathic.

Lots of people know that, but they won't mention it at work and lots of people who keep dogs and cats, who know that these animals have thoughts and feelings, are perfectly happy shopping in supermarkets, buying battery chicken meat that's been grown in battery chicken farms, which are based on the mechanistic principle that animals are nothing but machines.

They're part of a production line for industrial farming, for factory farming.

So people would be perfectly happy doing that, and as soon as they get home, think quite differently about their dog or cat.

So it's a completely split mentality.

If you take seriously your knowledge that dogs and cats and other animals are true living beings with feelings, and you take seriously your liking for plants, because gardening is one of the most popular of all hobbies, And even people who don't garden have houseplants.

So these are enormously big parts of people's lives, plants and animals.

But if you take those seriously, then you would challenge factory farming and industrial agriculture.

You might become a vegetarian or an animal rights activist.

So by keeping this split in our culture, it's business as usual in the government, academic, environment world.

I mean the business world and people's feelings and the more spiritual side of their being is privatised into their private lives and kept strictly separate from the public domain.

We've now created the split in other cultures.

We've exported Western scientific materialism.

So it's the dominant ethos of the ruling classes in Africa, Asia, South America, everywhere.

But when they're off duty in India, most Indians go back to being traditional Hindus or Muslims or Jains or whatever they are and when Japanese are off duty, you know, a lot of them appreciate haikus and cherry blossom and so forth.

So I think this split, we've got so used to it, it's hard to see that we live this very split life.

Bruce: I totally agree.

It's beautiful the way you describe it.

I think that I am very much a victim of that myself.

I was not an intellectual at school.

I wanted to side with the people who were the rationalists, the people who were doing well at school.

I wanted to be in that group and so when it has come about in my recent history that I've had these extraordinary experiences that have challenged my rational perspective of life, I find it very, very hard to let go.

I find it very hard to explore them even.

I've wanted to put them in a box and categorize it, put a label on it and say, oh, that was just me doing ayahuasca.

It's a drug.

It means nothing and yet there have these been experiences that that have really taken me into a magical realm, and it's been beautiful and yet, maybe I haven't yet fully had the courage to let go of some of those mechanistic views, because I don't want to be seen as stupid, because I'm still perhaps a little bit insecure in my intellect and do you think that that's quite common in our world, that people like myself are struggling with this bipolar perspective?

Rupert: Yes.

I think it's very common.

I mean, we all experience it.

I mean, I had the same experiences too, that everybody in our culture, I think, is torn between this kind of rationalist, scientific, materialist worldview and the more private feelings we have, the more private experiences and I think it's the basis of our whole civilisation as it's now constituted.

So I don't think it's unique to you at all.

Bruce: What do you think the dangers are? Do we need to recap? We remember what we were talking about.

I was just, yeah, what are the dangers you think in our society of this split?

Rupert: I think it's very unhealthy to have this split between rational intellect and science and feelings, emotion and experience, which everybody has to some degree and it comes from a particular scientific view.

It's not as if science has to be split off from experience like that.

But we have a kind of science at the moment based on a materialist philosophy that says the only reality is matter.

The mind is nothing but the activity of the brain.

It's all inside the head and basically consciousness doesn't really exist.

It's a kind of illusion produced by the computing machinery of the brain.

So this enormously downgrades consciousness, treats it as an illusion, as something that's just subjective, unscientific and therefore irrational, and completely dismisses all the things that are most important to us.

I mean, value, meaning, beauty, purpose, love.

I mean, those are nothing but...

chemical balances or electrical patterns in the brain or sort of impulses crossing synapses or waves of electrical activity in the cerebral cortex or the lower brain.

These are tremendously demystifying ways of looking at the world.

Even the most hard-headed materialist doesn't really believe that.

I mean, they don't really believe that when they get home from the lab.

I mean, if they did, they'd have very dysfunctional relationships with their partners, their children and their animals.

So they revert to being ordinary people once they get home, or at least the majority do.

So I think it's a terribly unhealthy philosophy and I don't think it's necessary for science either.

I think it's in fact become a straitjacket, a constriction on science itself.

The whole point of my recent book, The Science Delusion, is that science has become imprisoned within a materialistic dogmatism that's restricting what science itself can do.

restricting the freedom of inquiry and producing a highly distorted view of the world.

It's very good for building machines, if you take the assumption that everything's mechanistic.

It gives you a wonderful philosophy for machinery and for the Industrial Revolution and from computers and smartphones and internet and jet planes, all tremendously impressive, but it gives you a very bad way of understanding the natural world, the nature of life, the nature of mind, of consciousness.

of human society, of culture, of myth, of story, of religion, of spiritual experience.

Those are simply airbrushed out of the picture by this worldview, reduced to mere activity of material brains.

So I think it's a very unhealthy philosophy, not just for society, not just for individuals, but for science itself.

Bruce: And why is it, why has it come about like that? Is it just because if it can't be measured, it can't be true? Is that what science has become? Is it?

Rupert: I think it's more than just that.

It's partly if it can't be measured, it can't be true.

But it's basically an ideology that's developed in the history, very briefly, is that in the 17th century, there was a split.

The Descartes split, the Cartesian split, between mind and matter.

Descartes defined matter as unconscious, and minds as conscious, but non-material.

So the only non-material things in the universe were God, angels, and human minds.

The whole of the rest of the universe was unconscious matter.

Human body was unconscious matter, a machine.

The human mind, unlike animal minds, or animals didn't have minds, unlike anything else in nature, was immaterial and spiritual.

This gave a split between science and religion, and it enabled science to get on with studying the universe, and religion to remain in a separate compartment.

Descartes himself was quite religious, all the founding fathers of modern science were.

But it created this completely disconnected mind and it worked reasonably well until the 19th century, and a lot of people then got very upset about there being two things.

They said, we just want one thing, not two things, not dualism and so some became idealists and said, the only reality is mind or consciousness.

Matter is kind of dumbed down mind that's trapped in patterns of habit.

The other lot, the materialists, said this so-called immaterial mind doesn't exist.

Angels and God, forget it, they're just illusions, they don't exist at all and the human mind isn't something special, it's just the activity of the brain, it's nothing but the brain.

So materialism was a denial of the spiritual or mental pole of dualism and dualism itself was, I think, a very foreshortened, false kind of philosophy of nature, oversimplified philosophy of nature.

But it served the purposes of science in the 17th and 18th century, and it kept science and religion out of each other's hair most of the time, and enabled people to go on being religious and go on being scientific.

It provided a way of them living together fairly harmoniously.

So it served a useful purpose.

But in the end, it's very unsatisfactory.

So I think I'm not in favour of materialism or idealism or dualism.

I think that the basic model of reality we need is trinitarian.

We need at least three basic principles, not two or one.

But that's just another discussion.

It's a whole metaphysical question.

But the reason materialism came in was through denying dualism and it arose for ideological reasons and it was then backed with the authority of the Enlightenment project of science and reason and science is so successful in giving technologies, most people think it must be true.

What could possibly be wrong with this theory of nature? It works.

But it...

It's created all these terrible problems we now face today.

The way forward, I think, is by realising that materialism is an ideology that science is actually already outgrowing, actually in many ways has outgrown.

Bruce: Through things like.

Rupert: Well, through a more holistic view of nature, through, for example, Gaia theory, the idea that the Earth's a living organism.

It's a perfectly credible scientific theory and it's much better than thinking of the earth as just an assemblage of inanimate material.

It has a unity, a holistic unity.

Big Bang theory of the universe says the whole universe starts small, very small.

It's like the cracking of a cosmic egg that it hatches, as it were, the universe, and then it grows and expands and new things appear within it.

This is like a growing embryo or...

tree.

It's much more like a growing organism than like a clockwork machine, which was the old view of the universe, a kind of machine universe.

The universe is now like a holistic, unified, growing organism, where everything is interrelated.

The universal gravitational field contains everything that is, according to Einstein's theory.

everything is within this field which unifies and unites and connects everything.

So I think we're actually getting in many ways towards a more holistic view of nature through science itself.

Bruce: And do you think that the ancient Eastern traditions and maybe even indigenous traditions are finally being understood in a way in the West that is part of this new opening?

Rupert: I don't think that's happened yet.

I mean, I think it...

ought to happen and it should happen, and maybe you're somebody who's helping to make it happen.

I mean, this is, the idea that we could learn something from indigenous, especially animistic traditions, is not something that most Western intellectuals have considered.

The whole enlightenment project was to leave behind religion and superstition and march ahead into science and reason and from the Enlightenment point of view, primitive tribes were just that, primitive, people who had a childlike level of understanding, who needed to be improved and developed by us, which is why the missionaries of science and technology have spread out throughout the world and converted the entire world now, and all its governments at least, to the idea of economic development through science and technology.

because they're backward, primitive, superstitious, they need to be educated, they need to become literate, they need to have modern technologies, they need to go to school, and they need to learn about modern science, because that's the only way they can become modern, educated, liberated people.

So why bother studying their traditions? It's just mumbo jumbo, they need educating out of them.

So I think that's been the predominant attitude of the ruling classes here and of intellectuals and I think anthropologists haven't served us very well because they're the people who've actually spent lots of time with traditional people, fieldwork, often living there for a year or two or more.

But they go with the mindset that what these people believe is mumbo jumbo, and they want to classify it.

They want to understand that this kinship structure, the power structure, describe the myths of these people, all very valuable.

But as regards taking seriously that their shamans really heal, or that they really fly in their visions, or that they really contact animal spirits, or that rainmakers can really make rain, that's something that would not be permissible for the average anthropologist.

I think they have these experiences when they're there.

Many of them have experiences they can't share and can't talk to their colleagues about when they get back to their university.

They're sort of filtered out of this kind of rationalistic view of these other cultures.

And, of course, if people anthropologists start taking psychoactive drugs with these tribal people or start dancing and getting into trances or taking part in shamanic ceremonies, then they're breaking a terrible taboo.

It's a slippery slope that could lead to them going native and that, of course, is the last thing that they're meant to do.

Bruce: But it's okay on television.

Rupert: It's okay on television because it's classified as entertainment.

Bruce: It's wonderful hearing all the way you describe that because that resonates very deeply with myself.

I have had these experiences and I used to come back and classify them and talk to my very clever friends who I looked up to and they said, oh, Bruce, you were just doing a drug.

It means nothing at all.

Or, oh, Bruce, you were just doing a dance and so therefore it means nothing and yet it now seems that there are voices in the intellectual world, in the scientific world who are beginning to give credence to some of these perspectives, you being very much one of them.

How far away are we from this shift happening in the scientific world? Do you see it on the horizon or are you still seen as a crackpot on the, very much on the outside?

Rupert: Well, it depends whether you talk to people in public or in private.

In public, most people in the academic world, indeed most educated people, who've all got materialism as the kind of default worldview, that's sort of factory installed at university in most people's minds, or even at school, or by the time you get to the 6th form in an English school, you've, in the last two years of school, you're pretty well filled up with this worldview.

That's the official worldview, and any educated person knows that's what they're meant to believe.

So in public, they usually pretend to believe it in order to retain their credibility as an educated person.

Because if you don't believe this, then you're either stupid or feeble-minded or you've been duped or you're gullible or you've been victim of some guru or cult or something.

Or your mind's been addled by excessive drug taking or something of that kind.

But so people don't want to lose their credibility.

For example, telepathy, a subject on which I do research, is something that most educated people experience.

Most people experience it in connection with telephone calls, for example.

They think of someone who then rings, and then they say, it's funny, I was just thinking of you.

I've done lots of experiments.

It seems to be real, telephone telepathy, and there really does seem to be a telepathic influence here.

Now, 80% of the population have experienced that, including educated people.

But most of them wouldn't want to admit it in public to other educated people because it would lower their social standing.

Whereas in private, if they're friends or members of your family who've had a few glasses of wine or something, most people are perfectly prepared to talk about this.

In the scientific world, I would say most scientists have had psychic experiences or been to alternative healers or have dogs that know when they're coming home in a way that's seemingly telepathic, or have had altered states of consciousness, or have religious or spiritual practices, or have taken psychedelic drugs and have seen a different aspect of consciousness.

Probably if you add up all these things, it's the majority.

Very few of them are card-carrying Dawkinsites.

But When they're in public, and especially when they're at work, they wouldn't want to mention these things to their colleagues.

So they're very much in the closet about these kinds of experiences.

I find many scientists read my books, for example, and are quite sympathetic and very friendly and I get hundreds of friendly emails and lots of people in scientific conferences and scientific institutes tell me they're very interested in these things, have these experiences themselves.

But they almost always say, I can't tell my colleagues because they're so straight.

So there's a kind of conspiracy of silence about these things, a kind of taboo, which we'd be so much better off without.

I mean, I hope that your explorations and your journey is part of a process of opening up this whole field of debate, because most people in private will be prepared to admit these things are very interesting and people see films and television in the private part of their lives usually, so they're more open to it.

When they're at work, they may not want to talk about it or admit they've been following your explorations or journey.

Bruce: That's very sweet of you.

Ruby, you said that you've been experimenting in some of these areas, and obviously you're a scientist.

You understand the scientific methodology, you know about double-blind, about repeatable experiments and all the rest of it.

How, you mentioned telepathy.

Do you think that you have proven telepathy from a scientific perspective? Have you gone that far? Or is it something that's ethereal that it can't ever really be? shown through that methodology.

Rupert: Oh yes, it can be investigated scientifically, and I think the evidence is already very strong and if you look with scientific experiments, you do statistical analyses, and the statistical evidence for telepathy is much greater than the evidence for the Higgs boson, which is, after all, a pretty ethereal object.

You don't ever see a Higgs boson.

All you do is see sort of outputs from particle tracks of elusive particles in records from atom smashers, like the Large Hadron Collider.

You don't actually see one, you don't actually get one and hold it in your hand and yet these things are taken enormously seriously in science and so is dark matter and dark energy.

They make up 96% of reality and no one has a clue what they are and most scientists take them seriously and many scientists take seriously the idea of hundreds of millions of parallel universes that no one's ever observed and for which there's not a shred of evidence.

So it's not as if scientists demand things you can hold in a kind of common sense way.

Nowadays, modern physics has dissolved reality into virtual realities and invisible dimensions and parallel universes and quantum processes that no one really understands and elusive particles that exist only as momentary traces or whispers of their presence that are known any in terms of statistical probabilities.

Science has moved on a long way from kind of 19th century steam engine based science.

Modern physics is almost entirely about esoteric phenomena that hardly anyone can understand with extra dimensions and so on.

Telepathy is much much more real than that.

I mean it's much more easy to test and In our telephone telepathy test, for example, we have tests in which the subject names 4 people they might be telepathic with, close friends or family members.

They sit at home with a landline telephone, no caller ID display.

We film them to make sure they're not getting other phone calls or emails.

We pick one of the four callers at random, ring them up and ask them to call the subject.

They do.

The phone rings.

They know it's one of these four people.

They have to guess which of those people before they answer it.

I think it's John.

They picked it up.

Hello, John.

You're right or you're wrong.

By chance, you'd be right one time in four, 25%.

In these tests, they were right about 45% of the time.

It's hugely significant statistically.

This has been replicated in universities in Europe.

I now have an automated version of the test working on mobile phones that anyone can try for themselves.

I think the evidence is pretty strong.

80% of people have had this experience.

It's very familiar to lots of people.

The only experiments that have been done to test it have shown that this seems to be a statistical reality.

It's more significant than the Higgs boson.

anyone can do the test for themselves.

These large-scale tests are giving positive results.

I think this is fairly good evidence.

The skeptics who are opposed to this don't have any evidence at all.

they have is their prejudices and they're basically ******** materialists who are ideologically committed to a worldview.

which I think is completely incoherent.

The reason they exist is because, for historical reasons, we had this reaction against religion in the West, the growth of atheism and materialism, the capture of science by materialist ideology, and now a kind of entrenched defense of a materialist worldview.

by people who are terrified that if you let go of this, the world will be swamped by superstition and occultism and black magic and what Freud called the black mud of superstition will overwhelm civilization.

It has to be defended at all costs.

So it's a kind of hysterical denial.

of phenomena which, in fact, can be investigated scientifically, and if they exist, don't destroy science, they enlarge science.

It's much worse for science to be in a position of denialism, pretending things don't exist that do exist, rather than expanding and having a larger, more comprehensive and more rational scientific view of reality.

Bruce: Do you see that crumbling happening in in our lifetime.

Rupert: I think that this materialist worldview is crumbling all around us as we speak.

first of all, physics itself has gone beyond it.

Quantum physics has long since gone beyond old-style mechanistic thinking and current biologists, many of them, are trying to reduce the phenomena of life to the physics of the 19th century, but physics has moved on and so I think that that within science itself we've moved beyond that.

The Big Bang theory, the idea of an evolutionary universe, tells us we live in an organic, growing universe which is creative.

The entire evolutionary process is creative.

Long before evolution begins on Earth, we've had billions of years of cosmic evolution, stars, galaxies, planets.

Bruce: Rupert, you mentioned the word fear.

I think you're right.

That's the sense I get.

It's an incredible holding on.

for a paradigm that seems to be shaking and you say that could fit hand in glove with the new perspective, and it shouldn't be a problem, and don't worry, we're not going to fall and wallow in a world of superstition.

But in a way, if the mechanistic paradigm does crumble, that it does open all sorts of uncertainties that are completely beyond the realm of measurement, beyond the realm of anything and so I can understand the fear.

The whole thing is up for grabs in a way if we let go of that.

Do you think that their fear is valid or do you think it would be a positive period that we'd go into or would it be a crazy time?

Rupert: I think we're going into a crazy time anyway.

we're going into a crazy time because of environmental crisis, extreme weather events, meltdown of the financial system, you know, the collapse of the established neoliberal dogmas, you know, global trade, corporate capitalism, banks, investment, you know, governments just sort of delivering endless economic growth through...

None of that's...

going to be happening in the business as usual model.

So we're into very uncharted waters, whether or not there's a change in science.

I think that everybody knows that it's not going to be business as usual anymore.

So I think our best bet is actually to look as rationally and reasonably as we can at what science can tell us.

An expanded kind of science would be more open, less exclusive, less dogmatic and I think it's still our best guide, but not in the form of dogmatic materialism.

I think science and reason are enormously valuable.

That's why I'm a scientist and I try to pursue science in a reasonable way.

But what's often called science and reason today is neither scientific nor rational.

It's an ideological belief system and after all, the modern world isn't exactly governed by science and reason.

I mean, the reasons for the fact that Britain and many other countries are still building and maintaining nuclear weapons is based on fear, which is not rational or scientific in the sense it's, you know, these are emotions.

The advertising industry is based on encouraging the seven deadly sins, you know, lust, avarice, envy, sloth, greed.

These are the, these are, we've got an entire sophisticated, scientifically based in psychology industry, persuading people to adopt what in the past were universally regarded as vices, because those are engines of economic growth and economic growth is destroying the planet in many ways and changing the climate.

Is that rational? Well, it isn't and attempts to look at climate change and environmental destruction scientifically and rationally and then discuss it rationally by governments meeting in United Nations conferences doesn't result in a rational, politically agreed solution.

It results in no action at all.

results, or very little, it results in setting up more committees and agreeing to have further discussions.

Meanwhile, governments are captives of a political and economic system over which they're not really in control either.

Bruce: Do you think that if we do move into a new paradigm and people see that there's much more connection than we previously perhaps felt or were aware of, and that there are things greater than us, greater than the whole, and that there's much more meaning in the universe than we generally take within our culture.

That this will have an impact in our behaviour, in our ethics, in our morals.

Do you see us changing as a society, as a result of these new perspectives if we are able to bring them on board.

Rupert: I'd like to think so, but I think we've got so used to splitting ourselves that I'm not sure how much that would happen.

I mean, there's a part of most modern people which, the romantic part, where they do feel a connection with the natural world, at least with their garden and plants and their pet animals.

their friends and so on, and where they're not operating in this kind of materialistic way.

But we're still used to the whole public domain being given over to their economic act, corporate activity, profit-making and all the rest of it, which has to be changed too.

We have to find new ways of creating jobs, employment, running government, industry and so forth, that are less destructive of the environment.

Personal changes are relatively easy and lots of people undergo personal changes and they meditate or they have explorations of inner experience and that sort of thing or they have psychotherapy or they have religious and spiritual practices.

But the public domain remains fairly unchanged.

So I think the challenge is finding a new politics and a new way of ordering society and I think that as far as people's changes are concerned, it often involves changing communities, not just individuals and that's where I think religion has a major role to play, because one of the reasons why we have this fragmented society in the West is because of a decline of organized religion.

It's now, in Western Europe, a very marginal part of social life.

It used to be very important, and it's now very unimportant for most people in Britain.

way less than 10% of people have regular religious observance or practice.

90% of people don't, and some of them are spiritual but not religious, others are atheist or agnostic, but alienated at any rate from traditional religious practice and it may be that that's a liberating thing, it may be that it helps in some way getting out of the bad aspects of traditional religion, But it's also isolating, and I think that if there's going to be any kind of integrative growth of a new society, there has to be some kind of spiritual or religious dimension to it, and science can't provide that.

Bruce: No, I totally agree.

Do you think that many people, if they do move away from religion, because of the reasons that you highlighted, perhaps there's been some dogma or some aspects to the human aspects of that religious belief that they kind of don't feel they're in alignment with anymore.

But they still carry on with the spiritual practice in some way.

They feel that they are part of something that's bigger than them.

Do you think that there's a void there that some new spiritual understanding could come about, that people might have a, I don't know, a sympathy for that isn't so dogmatic and historical as, or do you think that actually our traditional beliefs are something that we should go back to?

Rupert: Well, I think that we have to...

I think a spiritual journey that's purely individual is the easiest thing to do and in the modern world, it's very attractive to a lot of people because it doesn't involve having to deal with the historical baggage of organized religions, Eastern or Western and I think it's helpful.

But I think the problem with it is that religion is typically something done by communities, not just individuals and I lived in India for seven years and one of the things I loved about Indian culture was that when there are festivals, like these great Hindu festivals like Diwali, then there are things that everyone takes part in.

The kids are there, the grown-ups are there, the old people are there.

The whole community takes part in a festival.

Now, we still have a residue of that in England with Christmas, where Christmas is a traditional festival which does involve most people and even if for many people the religious focus is not the central one, many of the themes of it being a collectively enjoyed festival are there.

I think we need festivals.

I think we need sacred places.

I think we need pilgrimages and things like that, which are all part of traditional religious practice.

I mean, Hindus have pilgrimages.

Muslims have them.

After all, the Hajj to Mecca is the biggest in the world of pilgrimages and in England, in the Middle Ages, there were lots of pilgrimages.

Canterbury was one of the great centres, and Chaucer's Canterbury Tales was, after all, set on a pilgrim journey.

There are still pilgrimage places in England, and there are plenty in continental Europe, and there are some wonderful ones in Ireland.

So I think that these, I think, recovering a sense of sacred place, sacred festivals, collective celebration, are more to do with religion than an entirely individualized pick and mix spirituality, which, if people have a bit of Native American here mixed in with a bit of Buddhism and, you know, a few crystals and that kind of thing, I mean, you can make your own kind of salad, a spiritual cell, and it fits with this very Western obsession with free choice and individualism.

But it doesn't have this collective dimension, which I think we need as well, because we're social animals and we need to express our spiritual lives, not just individually, but in community, and we need to have something in which children can grow up and feel part of a larger community.

So I do think in all cultures, the Traditions are very important and one of the things that makes other cultures attractive to us is the fact that they do have collective celebrations and shared experiences and traditions that they follow.

If one went, I mean, probably in a few years' time when you visit tribal cultures, they'll have lost them and they'll all be watching, playing video games on handheld devices and linked up to the internet through smartphones and so on, and part of the same world we're in here.

Is that an advance? Some might think so, but it will make them much less interesting to us because the very thing we appreciate in them are the things that we've lost ourselves and if they lose them too, then I think we'll be much less interested in them.

So I think what other cultures have to offer us and what's so attractive about them is this tradition, this integration of individuals with the community and with the ancestors and with tradition and I think we need to recover that ourselves.

Bruce: Would you be interested in a recovery of something like that goes all the way back, perhaps, you know, before Christianity, before paganism back? Would you,

do you think that there, you know, there's still enough that we could pull out of the ashes of some of our oldest, oldest traditions and have them as unifying ways of coming together as a community.

Rupert: Well, I think that the oldest traditions probably had, which in a way we still have, are seasonal festivals.

I mean, if we look at the megalithic monuments of Europe, New Grange in Ireland, which is lit up on the winter solstice, and something like West Kennet Long Barrow in Wiltshire, which is similar to Newgrange.

This is 3,500 BC.

This is one of the oldest buildings in Britain.

I mean, of course, humans go back hundreds of thousands of years, and we, people were doing paintings in caves 30,000 years ago, but thinking of Britain, which is where we are now, 3,500 BC.

That's aligned on the equinox, so the light at the day when the spring and autumn equinoxes, the light shines into that chamber too.

So it's clear that these traditional societies were ordering their society in accordance with the seasons of the year.

This is pretty basic and I think that the seasonal festivals, they were Christianized, the ancient seasonal festivals in Europe were taken over and incorporated into Christian seasonal festivals.

So I think the way in which most of them survive today is in their Christianized form and I don't think there's anything wrong with that.

I think it's a cultural integration and most of what we see in traditional Christianity is based on pre-Christian roots.

It's integrated them.

So I don't see it as we're stripping away the whole of 2,000 years of Christian tradition and somehow trying to go back to some purer earth-based religion.

I see it's better to build up.

It's been an accretive growth, a growth and integration over a long period and I think it's better to continue with an evolutionary process that integrates rather than trying to get back some kind of megalithic fundamentalism.

because we know so little about it anyway that we'd be totally at the mercy of rival schools of archaeologists who all have different theories as to what these ancient monuments or cave paintings were all about.

Bruce: Have you had moments in your own life that have given you strong sensations of things that are paranormal, non-scientific, connections to the universe, whatever, all of these things that that we generally rationally dismiss.

Have you had your own very strong experiences like that?

Rupert: I have, yes.

I mean, I've had quite a few experiences where I felt that I'm part of something much greater than myself, that my mind's part of a much greater conscious being or beings.

I actually, I think these are common.

I don't think I'm particularly special in that respect.

I think many people have them.

In our culture, there's to be against talking about them.

As a child, I had a very strong sense of connection with the natural world and with animals.

I kept a lot of pets and I was really into plants and animals.

That's why I became a biologist.

I've had experiences, you know, when I've been meditating that a sense of being connected to something much greater than myself.

Senses when I've been in the natural world in beautiful settings with flowers, in gardens, in woods, in mountains, which again, I think many people have a sense of connection with a much greater reality than my own rather petty personal concerns.

I have had various experiences of altered states of consciousness.

I have experiences of Beauty, the transcendent beauty.

I mean, for me, one of the most beautiful, almost predictably beautiful experiences in England is going to choral Evensong in one of our great cathedrals, where you almost every day they have this choir singing sublimely beautiful music and these magnificent Gothic structures or Norman structures that have been there for hundreds of years resonating to sacred music and you hear this music echoing around the cathedral.

a solemn, dignified liturgy with wonderful language.

I mean, this is enormously, I think, beautiful for me, transcendently beautiful and something which is produced in some of these things can't be turned on like a tap.

You know, they come spontaneously and unbidden.

But it's pretty predictable that Coral Evensong among our cathedrals is going to be a beautiful, and if you're open to it, moving experience and it's a wonderful thing that all over Britain, indeed, all over the world, on a daily basis, people are carrying out these kinds of rituals and sacred chants and singing in ancient sacred places, maintaining traditions and connections with the past, which, however they work, are moving to many people.

I don't think I'm unique again in these respects.

So yes, I think that almost anyone probably has experiences of a world and conscious realms greater than themselves.

If they don't, I think they're probably leading a very impoverished life.

But lots of people get this through direct experience, through art, through music, through dancing together.

through religious ceremony and ritual, through sacred places, through mountains, through woods, through making love, through personal experiences that take us beyond our normal routines.

So I think this is what makes life worth living, and it's what makes life worth living for most people, whatever their religious beliefs or scientific beliefs.

But I think it's possible to lead a more integrated life where these experiences are integrated with one's intellectual understanding rather than being in completely separate compartments and I think it's probably healthier to find a more integrated way of living personally and collectively.

Bruce: I've been very privileged to have been in positions where I've been right next to all sorts of extraordinary activities, shamans speaking in tongues and reaching altered states and all sorts of stuff and by and large, I was actually not open to it and didn't feel much at all.

I was one of those impoverished people, and I really was.

I mean, I was sympathetic and I was respectful, but I was very closed and it was only actually later that I allowed myself, through the intellect, too open, that I was able to feel all these other sensations that came flooding in with joy.

What was holding me back from having those experiences first?

Rupert: I think all of us are held back by some reasonable level of fear.

I mean, if we're open to everything, we'd be swept along in all sorts of chaotic directions and there are a lot of things I I don't particularly want to be open to.

I mean, I don't want to be open to the experience of heroin addiction, for example.

I think that it's reasonable to be fearful of certain destructive kinds of addiction.

Even though I dare say there's a pleasure to it, people do it because there's some overwhelming momentary pleasure involved.

So I don't think being open to everything is a virtue necessarily, and I think that being...

But being excessively fearful on the basis of an intellectual theory is probably an inhibiting and constricting thing and I think, you know, dogma and prejudice shape us all and we have to become aware of what holds us back.

I find myself, and one of the things I was closed about was the Christian tradition.

I mean, I became a scientific atheist when I was at school and at university.

Because that was part of the package deal.

If you become a scientist, you become a materialist, you become an atheist, you sneer at every kind of religious tradition on the grounds you're smarter than them.

I hear all these stupid people believing all these dogmas and I've risen above it.

I mean, the bonus for atheists is feeling that you're smart.

I thought that was great, you know, for a while and then I realised actually this was rather a shallow position and it was cutting me off from things when I travelled for the first time in Asia, in India, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand.

I travelled there in the 1960s and found cultures of people who seemed to me very sophisticated and smart, not stupid, not contemptibly corrupt or bogged down in superstition, but with highly sophisticated views of the world, of Buddhist monks, Hindu meditators, sadhus, who seemed to have a much bigger grasp of reality than anything I'd come across.

That really opened my mind up.

But I still retained A prejudice against Christianity, which is the standard default enlightenment position of educated people in the West.

It wasn't until many years later when I was living in India that I found a way of coming to terms with the Christian tradition, which I'd got a great prejudice against.

It wasn't exactly fear.

It was a kind of just a deep prejudice that had I'd inherited from this kind of enlightenment rationalist propaganda which has been a standard part of Western education for 200 years, implicitly at least.

So I think it's not just fear, it's taboos and it's dogmas and it's prejudices and we're all going to end up with taboos, dogmas and prejudices.

It's probably impossible to be free of them all, but some are more harmful and restrictive than others and so I think through travelling, through exploration, through talking to others and through experience, we can become more open.

But in a way, we have to find a path that we can follow and we can't go on endlessly being open to everything because it's limitless.

One has to find a way of living and that's the challenge, to be open enough to find things that contribute to a way of living in a more harmonious way.

But not making exploration a full-time job, because one has to get on with the rest of one's life too.

Bruce: Sure.

Although what you say resonates very deeply with me, I think that I still have a bit of my own shadow is my Christian background.

I was very Christian when I was younger and I enjoyed it and I expressed a belief.

I was almost evangelical at times and then I went into the period of my life of deep questioning and I realized there's many things about it that didn't fit for me and then I, having also experienced other cultures and other traditions, I saw that there was a vast array of stuff that was as wonderful it seemed to me and yet I still kept a little bit of a dark perspective of my own background, perhaps a bit of fear, perhaps a bit of, definitely prejudice, perhaps a bit of embarrassment of having been there once or something and I think I've still got to deal with that.

I think that's part of my own journey.

Maybe during, my mum may come and do ayahuasca with me.

She's debating it herself and I invited her just the other day and she's a very staunch Christian and has been her whole life, and all of my family, and so I think that will be a really interesting time for me.

Do you have any advice?

Rupert: Well, I think if she's going to do that, it might be easier to do it in Brazil, where they have these Christian ayahuasca-based churches, Santo Daime, for example.

which is a syncretic thing, where they've got the whole Christian tradition, and they take this mind-altering substance as a communion in a group and if she did it in a shamanic context in Peru or something, then that's got a whole other cultural

packaging and it might be easier for her to make a bridge with her Christian background to take ayahuasca in a Christian setting where It's preceded by prayers.

The Ayahuasca people in the Santo Diamond tradition start with the Our Father and the Hail Mary and the hymns that they sing, and obviously not the same kinds of hymns you get in the Church of England.

They're their own Ayahuasca songs, but they relate to the Christian tradition in a way that might be much more helpful to your mother than something that's from some completely different and unconnected tradition.

I don't like giving generic advice because it depends on where people are coming from.

You know, everyone starts from a different position and so, you know, it's very hard to give kind of all-purpose, one-size-fits-all suggestions.

But I think in terms of science, I think it's important to be aware of the restrictions and dogmas of materialism and how to go beyond them and that's what I try and address in my book, The Science Delusion, which is called Science Set Free in America, because it is about setting science free.

When it comes to a spiritual journey, I think people have to find a path that makes sense for them.

Sometimes people have a problem with a religious tradition in which they've been brought up.

I mean, there are lots of people who are embittered by a fundamentalist background, or people who've had a hard time with the Roman Catholic Church or something.

But nowadays, at least in Europe, most people haven't had any religious instruction at all.

They've grown up in a kind of religious void, and there's no reason to buy into other people's traumas with particular, they should find their own.

I myself think it's really important to come to terms with one's own religious tradition.

I mean, if one comes from a Christian background with the Christian tradition, if one's Jewish with the Jewish tradition, if one's Muslim with the Muslim tradition, Hindu the Hindu tradition.

Even if one wants to move to a different tradition or move beyond it, it's not going to go away by just ignoring it and that's why I feel that so much, even in people that are anti-religious.

I mean, atheists in Europe are a kind of extreme Protestant sect.

I see them as a Christian heresy, as a Christian sect.

Atheist? Yes, atheism is a kind of Protestant heresy.

You know, the Protestants rebelled against the Roman Church by criticizing it, sort of the superstition.

They were against pilgrimage because none of these sacred places in Europe are in the Bible, because the Bible's only about sacred places in Palestine and so they were

against pilgrimage, they were against the sacred festivals, because they said they're pagan, which they were, you know, they were Christianized.

So there was this kind of skeptical critique of many aspects of Roman Catholicism.

That's what Protestantism was about.

But they held on to the Bible and faith and the Word of God and the Bible and then if you just take that one step further, and turn that same critique of biblical-based Protestantism, you arrive at atheism.

I've never heard it described like that before.

I think it's a kind of extreme form of Protestantism, and it has that same kind of evangelical flavor as a lot of Protestantism, some evangelical Protestantism.

I mean, we've all come across evangelical atheists, who feel it's their mission to liberate the world from religion and sort of turn everyone on to science and reason and that kind of thing.

I see it essentially as a Christian heresy.

Bruce: They're high priests in their own right.

Rupert: Yes, they're high priests in their own right.

They've created a kind of alternative religion of science.

whereas they turned science into a religious system, which is very bad for science, because it shouldn't be a dogmatic fundamentalist belief system, it should be a method of open inquiry and agnostics and secular humanists, again, I think are people who are, as it were, heretical Christians, they retain the morality of most of Christianity, you know, helping others, caring about the poor, the sick, the downtrodden, widows and orphans, all these basic ethical teachings are there, but they just don't want what they see as the supernatural dogmatism or credulity.

But essentially, they have all the hard work of Christianity without the fun and I think that that's, again, something that one needs to be aware of, these historical influences, because we're all formed by historical habits, cultural habits and personal habits and if one's unaware of them, one's a kind of victim of them and if one's aware of them, one can accept them more thankfully or reject them if one wants to reject them, but reject them in a more conscious way.

Bruce: I think I could learn from your words there.

I think I need to take on that, on board that myself.

I, in my own journey, I, through my inner investigation, which has only happened really as a result of understanding Eastern traditions and shamanic traditions, that I have been able to look inside and found that actually it seemed that there was an ethical code that was always there.

I have an understanding of how to behave in most given situations if I'm only able to be present with my deeper self and yet at the same time, that's not often what my previous Christian beliefs were about.

That was They were, my ethical code there came from a book and it came from a pulpit and I kind of have chosen to prefer my own inner understanding because it seems to be more loving, actually, a lot of the time.

It seems to be less corruptible and more respectful often and so that's why I've kind of stepped away from that quite happily.

But I also think that my stepping away has been, has left a darkness, a shadow, and I have to come to terms with that and see that there is immense beauty and immense wisdom and immense love in that tradition that I came from and that I shouldn't turn my back on it.

I need to incorporate it perhaps and yet at the same time, I don't want to lose that inner understanding because I think that's something that feels very real to me.

Would you say you have a similar...

Rupert: No, it's very similar.

I mean, I think for me, what was important was, because I did reject the Christian tradition, and then I was in India, I was doing yoga and meditation and visiting temples and going to pilgrimage places and listening to gurus and gained and learned a huge amount from that and I still do yoga on a daily basis and I meditate.

So I didn't see it as either or and I saw it as both and.

I mean, if you do yoga, it doesn't mean to say you can't go to choral evensong in a cathedral and nor would any Hindu expect that.

I mean, most Hindus have a very inclusive view of religion.

They're prepared to embrace all forms of spirituality.

It's a very inclusive, not exclusive approach to religion, which I think we've got a lot to learn from.

So I don't see it as either or and I don't see personal spiritual experiences being somehow contrary to collective participation in collective religion like services and festivals.

I see it as completely complementary.

I don't see it's either or.

I think it's both and.

Yeah.

Bruce: No, I, you're making me think already a great deal about my own journey and for that I'm really grateful.

Rupert: Maybe you should go to Coral Evensong.

I was thinking, somewhere like Westminster Abbey, they do it almost every day.

Lincoln Cathedral.

You know, all our great cathedrals.

During term time, the boys are on holiday, you know, in the summer.

But A Coral Evensong cathedral would be a very good way of connecting with the whole tradition, you know, because you've got the building, hundreds of years of history, and this whole musical tradition for centuries, a whole liturgy which is dignified and because Coral Evenson on weekdays doesn't have a sermon, there's not going to be anything to put most people on in terms of the preaching, although sermons are often quite helpful.

But it's an experience of meditation, prayer, contemplation and tradition.

Bruce: Well, I think you really have got me thinking.

I think I need to take my parents.

That's what I need to do.

I need to reconnect with that element.

Because I do upset them at times.

I haven't come to terms with my past in that way and they represent that and I think that talking to you now has softened me a little and I see the wisdom of that.

So I..

and I'll make a promise to you now, that I'm going to take my parents to an Evensong.

I mean, both my brothers were choristers in Wales Cathedral.

I went to that school and I...

Rupert: Oh, well, there you are.

Go to Evensong in Wales.

Bruce: Yeah, with my family.

Rupert: I was in Wales just a couple of days ago.

Is that right? It's a wonderful place.

So I think that would be a wonderful thing, go to Evensong in Wales Cathedral with the family, in a spirit of just being part of it, not trying to be separate, but just...

If you're asking them to share with you in Welsk, then share with them in lots of family tradition.

Bruce: That's a really lovely idea.

It's a lovely idea.

Thank you, Rufus.

Bruce Parry
Tawai: A Voice From the Forest
2017

<www.youtube.com/watch?v=CgElkQmqg9k> & <www.tawai.earth>
These are automatic transcripts that have been worked on error correcting, but could always use more work.