

Spiritual Intelligence

Spiritual Intelligence:
*What it is, why it's needed,
how it might return*

Mark Vernon

Perspectiva is a registered charity operating as a collective of scholars, artists, activists, futurists and seekers who believe credible hope for humanity's future lies in forms of economic restraint and political cooperation that are beyond prevailing epistemic capacities and spiritual sensibilities. We work to develop an applied philosophy of education for individual and collective realisation in the service of averting societal collapse; and to cultivate the imaginative and emotional capacity required to usher in a world that is, at the very least, technologically wise and ecologically sound.

systems-souls-society.com

Mark Vernon

Mark Vernon is a writer, psychotherapist and associate of *Perspectiva*. He contributes to and presents programmes on the radio, as well as writing for the national and religious press, and online publications. He also podcasts, in particular *The Sheldrake-Vernon Dialogues* with Rupert Sheldrake, gives talks and leads workshops. He has a PhD in ancient Greek philosophy, and other degrees in physics and in theology, having studied at Durham, Oxford and Warwick universities. He is the author of several books, including his latest, out this year: *Dante's Divine Comedy: A Guide for the Spiritual Journey*. He used to be an Anglican priest and lives in London, UK. For more information see www.markvernon.com.

Spiritual Intelligence: *What it is, why it's needed, how it might return*

Mark Vernon

What is spiritual intelligence?

I recently became a wizard. Unfortunately, my assumption of the role involved neither magical rites nor secret lore. Rather, I became a wizard of a pedestrian type, increasingly common in a technological age.

I am involved in a project seeking to build an artificial spiritual companion using AIs.¹ Trials involve individuals pretending to be AIs, so that patterns of exchange can be mapped for computers to replicate. The artificial artificial intelligences, also known as real people, are called wizards after the Wizard of Oz, who turns out to be an ordinary person on the other side of a screen. I was one such pretender.

That said, second-guessing how an AI might respond to human explorations of meaning turns out to be a fascinating experience, in part because it requires a conscious effort not to respond meaningfully. The aim of the exercise is merely to reflect back what a person has said and leave them to develop their thoughts and feelings. And this is hard to do. Interacting with another without conveying intimations of comprehension and significance feels cold and uncaring. I finished the trials with a renewed sense that we humans are congenital seekers and searchers. Discovery is built into the intelligence with which we engage with others and the world.

Reflecting on this spontaneous cognitive multi-dimensionality reminded me of the time I interviewed the physicist, Roger Penrose. The Nobel laureate is a self-confessed Platonist because he believes that Plato's intuition, that appearances are reflections of wider realities, is the only way to explain the remarkable links that physicists find between abstract mathematics and the natural world – the phenomenon that another physicist and Nobel prize winner, Eugene Wigner, summarised as 'the unreasonable effectiveness of mathematics in the physical sciences'.² I wanted to talk to Penrose about what he makes of the way the human mind can appreciate such symmetries and connections, and why that unveils the workings of the cosmos. What I didn't anticipate was how the metaphysics would overshadow our meeting even before the conversation began.

It was evening and, as we walked into his room, he turned on a light. 'Ah. Bathed in eternity', he reflected. He knows that the entities we call photons travel at the speed of light, being light, which is to say that they don't experience time. They exist in eternity.

The moment took me by surprise. I can still feel the tingle on my skin. His observation felt akin to William Blake's remark that when he looked at the sun, he didn't see a disk of fire, somewhat like a golden guinea. 'Oh! No! No!', he continued: 'I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host, crying, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!'. Blake's is Christian language, rather than Platonic, but what he and Penrose share is a type of intelligence, common to humanity, that enables us to detect more.

I reckon that desire for more cannot be suppressed and I'm not alone in that. The political scientist, Francis Fukuyama, has reflected upon it too. In his book, *The End of History and The Last Man*, he discusses the vacuum of meaning that can spread in liberal democracies because of the longing for more than a consumptive life of security and plenty. He draws on the ancient Greek notion of thumos, which Plato explores in his dialogue, the *Phaedrus*. Thumos is the capacity to feel the vitality of life, often referred to by the word 'soul'. Plato explains that thumos is a human characteristic which experiences passionate desires, such as the yearning for what is good. It might manifest in various ways, from the hero's love of glory to the sage's search for wisdom. Plato argued that Socrates had satisfied his thumos in the noble manner of his death and the ancient philosopher's calm but fatal imbibing of the hemlock illuminates Fukuyama's point that thumos is not interested in security and comfort, but demanding

goals, even if they require self-sacrifice. '[Thumos] tries to prove that the self is something better and higher than a fearful, needy, instinctual, physically determined animal', Fukuyama explains.³

The risk for overly rational societies, which are inclined to dismiss the spiritual and treat human beings as cogs in a mindless machine, Fukuyama continues, is that thumos re-emerges in violent and perverse ways. The return of a repressed thumos is one way of understanding the significance of Donald Trump and conspiracy theories, as well as the impulsive and pseudo-empowering appeal of culture spats and wars.

The project for which I sit as a wizard, on the other side of the screen, has aims in addition to trialing artificial spiritual companions. Recognising that AIs are increasingly present and shaping our lives, it is seeking to describe the type of intelligence that yearns for what is beautiful and difficult, and can detect eternity in light and the sunrise. It can be given a name: spiritual intelligence. The idea is to ask what spiritual intelligence might be, in contrast to other types, particularly artificial intelligence. The enquiry is not motivated by the fear that AIs are about to become Terminator-like machines that may kill us: to my mind, the advance of AIs is demonstrating how elusive sentient consciousness is to silicon replication. Rather, the more immediate danger is that we increasingly fail to trust the full variety of intelligences we possess, culturally and individually.

Spiritual intelligence is, unsurprisingly, a contested term in the study of human intelligences. The psychologist, Howard Gardner, considers it in his seminal work on multiple intelligences, though favours the term existential intelligence. I am going to stick with the spiritual designation, in part to signal what the psychologist and editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Psychology and Spirituality*, Lisa Miller, calls 'the emerging field of postmaterial psychology'.⁴

She argues that the term postmaterial is needed because it is the best way to capture the growing body of evidence that 'the human brain can detect broad, non-material communications'.⁵ These intelligent exchanges with human and non-human others - known in moments of prayer and meditation, contemplation and peak experiences - lead many, if not most of humanity, to believe they are in relationship with a higher power or divinity, however conceived. Others will prefer to speak of an innate sense of the transcendent, meaning an awareness of a level of existence that weaves through and underpins the empirical, rational and emotional: it is powered by wonder, generates

The idea is to ask what spiritual intelligence might be, in contrast to other types, particularly artificial intelligence. The enquiry is not motivated by the fear that AIs are about to become Terminator-like machines that may kill us: to my mind, the advance of AIs is demonstrating how elusive sentient consciousness is to silicon replication.

wisdom, and insists on asking why? Miller stresses the huge value of this 'heart-knowing', to cite another description that makes clear the link between spiritual intelligence and the felt body, as is stressed in a range of fields from the neuroscience of comprehension to studies in human development.⁶ People value these insights because they guide them, console them, challenge them.⁷ An awareness of this more comes with seeking and is integral to meaning.

The psychologist and lead of the artificial spiritual companions project, Fraser Watts, notes that different kinds of intelligence are often grouped into two broad types. One is propositional, problem-solving and model-making in nature. It is analytical and is the type of intelligence that dominates work in AI, which 'sometimes seems to assume that all the human mind ever does is solve problems', Watts writes.⁸ But it doesn't, and so a second type of intelligence must be considered and characterised in a different way, as involving participatory engagement and inspirational apprehensions. This type is described as dispositional, rather than propositional, and is active in a wide range of human concerns, from the creation of art to the cultivation of virtues. It can also understand that logic and reason must be the servants of the imagination and comprehension, as Iain McGilchrist, has described it.⁹ Spiritual intelligence is part of this second group too.

Dispositional knowing is an ancient capacity, though its perceptions and modes evolve over time, producing everything from the cave art of the Paleolithic to the philosophy of figures from Dogen Zenji, to Averroes and Thomas Aquinas. 'Homo sapiens has always been Homo spiritualis', explains the science writer, Laura Spinney.¹⁰ 'That's what links humanity through time and space, and it doesn't seem likely to change any time soon'.

That said, it is necessary to attempt a re-articulation of spiritual intelligence for the contemporary moment. Modernity might be described as the attempt to evolve Homo spiritualis out of existence, and even if the attempt seems increasingly outdated, we are still left with Fukuyama's observations about the risks of living in a soulless age. So consider three areas in which spiritual intelligence is operative and which can, therefore, serve to illuminate it: the desire for the good, the experience of time, and the nature of societal wellsprings. These three may not only help alert us to the intelligence that we have and AIs fail to replicate, but may also help us re-discover and formulate what others at *Perspectiva* have explored as a metaphysics fit for the future.¹¹ So first consider the desire for the good.

The sovereignty of good

In her collection of essays, published as *The Sovereignty of Good*, the philosopher and novelist, Iris Murdoch, explores the ambivalences of human attempts to grasp what's good. She argues that because what's good always exceeds us, many have the apprehension that, somehow, the good stands over us and can, on occasion, be experienced as calling us. We don't have it, it has us.

The draw of what's good is, in fact, the unmistakable sign that we are spiritual creatures, she continues, and an intelligence that can be called spiritual is, therefore, required to orientate a way of life around the good, as it develops capacities of expectancy, discernment, and receptivity.¹² Murdoch argued that only spiritual intelligence has this wisdom, as opposed to other types of know-how or know-that, for a number of reasons.

An obvious one is that the appeal of the good does not depend upon any rational or moral agreement about what the good is. To put it another way, the fact that human beings dispute what's good is, to spiritual intelligence, a clear sign that what's good profoundly matters. Conversely, spiritual intelligence can facilitate the tolerance of any discord that comes with such disputes and may further be required if damaging conflicts about the good are to be avoided.

Our love of the elusive good does not depend upon unambiguous manifestations of it, which is just as well. One of the features of the good, as it shows up in the world, is that it is routinely mixed up with what's less than ideal, if not self-evidently bad. Further, what is good for one person may well be bad for another. 'The sea is the purest and most polluted water', noted Heraclitus. 'Fish can drink it and it is good for them; to me it is undrinkable and death-dealing'.¹³

Faced with such conundrums, human beings often resort to moral arguments and attempt to resolve the seeming contradictions. Perhaps the most widespread approach in the modern world is to seek to undo the entanglement of good and evil by focusing on the consequences of actions and weighing them in the balance. Another is to derive universal moral laws that can be adhered to regardless of outcomes. Another again is simply to assert what will happen, according to the conviction that 'might is right'.

Spiritual intelligence is different. It is not overly troubled by the compromises required to live because it knows how to hold onto what's good, even when faced with conflicts and shadows. This can

lead to conclusions that, at first glance, seem shocking. 'If all evil were prevented, much good would be absent from the universe', observed Thomas Aquinas. 'A lion would cease to live, if there were no slaying of animals; and there would be no patience of martyrs if there were no tyrannical persecution'.¹⁴ Spiritual intelligence can see good *in* ill, and often in surprising and unexpected ways. An example of this would be the way that tragedies move us because they simultaneously radiate love.

To put it another way, with an awareness of spiritual intelligence, education becomes an activity that seeks to draw out and recollect, rather than pour in and test.

Further still, spiritual intelligence understands that failure and disaster do not erase the hope for and possibility of perfect goodness. Quite the opposite. Spiritual adepts from across the world's wisdom traditions insist on the reality of perfection, and only spiritual intelligence can understand why. As Murdoch continues, the injunction that human beings should 'Be perfect!', and not just a bit better, is crucial. It takes us out of ourselves and helps keep us aligned with that which might make us more than ourselves. Ideals matter because living well is not about replicating behaviour, as an AI attempts to do, though we may well do much imitating at times. Rather, it is about participating in an experience of life whose vitality exceeds us and our ability wholly to mirror or understand it – though we can intuitively delight in and know of it.

This analysis suggests a range of practical outcomes required to secure the presence of the mysterious good in our lives once more because spiritual intelligence grows with a concern for rituals, worship and the arts, alongside reason, rules and the sciences. Such activities, understood spiritually, can align individuals and groups to deeper pulses of reality and carry them to the shorelines of knowledge, where learning becomes a type of listening, thought a type of resonance, and personal change a type of inner expansion.

To put it another way, with an awareness of spiritual intelligence, education becomes an activity that seeks to draw out and recollect, rather than pour in and test. The disposition of the individual towards themselves and others evolves with growing spiritual intelligence too, which is why it is discerned in someone because of the qualities that they embody, not because of the cleverness of what they say.

This means that spiritual intelligence is known and understood best not by being described but by being transmitted and experienced, so spaces in which experience can be reflected upon are also crucial, from the psychotherapist's couch to periods of retreat. The good is not like Newton's Second Law of Motion which, once discovered, can

be preserved in writing, though it can be conveyed in the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves. As the philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre, remarked, proofs don't much matter in philosophy. Narratives do.¹⁵ A future that values spiritual intelligence will, therefore, also be one with a renewed interest in myth, vision and the meaning of history.

Spiritual intelligence rests most securely on a type of knowing that is not told but shown, not proven but felt. It changes the experience of the world from the inside out, which leads us to the second area of inquiry, the way we experience time. What another colleague at *Perspectiva*, Ivo Mensch, calls *temporics* offers another way of illuminating these horizons.

Being and time

In the industrialised world, time has been instrumentalised to control, if not cajole. In fact, the powers that be have long tried to use time in this way.¹⁶ Ancient Romans complained that Rome, which prided itself on freedom, had too many sundials. Citizens and slaves objected to them because they regimented the passing of the day and imposed an overbearing order on the people. That said, sundials are not wholly accurate and keep life coupled to a heavenly body, the sun. They, thereby, recall that we depend upon forces beyond our control – a link lost in the modern period when time came to be tracked more precisely, and imposed more thoroughly, after the invention of reliable, mechanical clocks.

The efficiencies that they enabled meant that they became all pervasive. For example, it is impossible to imagine the commercial successes of the British empire without clocks. Hundreds of time signals were erected around the world, from the coasts of Africa to the bays of Australasia. They ensured that maritime trading networks could be coordinated, helping to secure profitability. As guns fired, hour by hour, populations around the globe marched to the beat of the colonial power.

Little wonder that life has become increasingly stressful and demoralising with the placing of portable time signals into our hands and pockets. Mobile phones and portable computers order the day to the sub-second. It's not that being able reliably to tell the time doesn't bring many advantages. But there's a cost, which brings us back to spiritual intelligence. I think that the real damage done by clock-

time comes when other experiences of time are lost to the relentless ticking of the clock.

Consider again the moment when Penrose flooded the room with eternity. It was what can be called a kairos moment, when an ordinary event – entering a room – became an extraordinary incident, which I vividly remember. Kairos is a reminder that whilst the day often feels irresistibly divided into structured periods for work and leisure, sustenance and sleep, time also has transgressive qualities that are important in the perception of the spiritual.

The word ‘kairos’ comes from the ancient Greek practice of manual weaving. It describes the right moment to throw the shuttle cleanly through the loom. It was an art possessed by Penelope, in Homer’s *Odyssey*, which is to say that she not only knew how to spin quality cloth, but also how psychologically to stay in the moment awaiting Odysseus’s return, as the calendar years of his wandering around the Mediterranean mounted. In other words, kairos time is closer to eternity, partly because it is in instances of kairos that eternity is detected, such as when William Blake knew eternity in an hour as he held infinity in the palm of his hand; and partly because kairos time transcends clock-time, which left to itself would consume life, much as the god, Chronos, was said to eat his children.

With kairos, time is not experienced as a continuum of hellish repetitions, or a progress of growth and accumulation interrupted by occasional crises, but instead as a continuous, alive presence. The moment becomes the moving image of eternity, to use Plato’s expression, and the day can be experienced as a portal rather than a prison. The adepts of spiritual intelligence testify to this in various ways: the present can be known as boundless, which means that life can be known as abundant with novelty and freshness always breaking in, not marked by scarcity and the grim attempt to consume, manage and possess it.

Moreover, kairos asks us to be active in the reception of life, as opposed to being bound to hedonic and commercial treadmills. We must cultivate the right qualities of attention to appreciate it, and a readiness to participate in its alternative rhythms, lest its irruptions are either not noticed or are left as unintegrated peak experiences. ‘The quality of our attachments is the quality of our understanding’, observed Murdoch, with the implication that as our intelligence broadens, so the things to which we are attached become deeper and more stable.¹⁷ Asking yourself how you experience time is a

With kairos, time is not experienced as a continuum of hellish repetitions, or a progress of growth and accumulation interrupted by occasional crises, but instead as a continuous, alive presence.

seminal question. It offers a direct path to re-establishing spiritual intelligence, and it can be done in each and every moment.

Kairotic knots

This is not just a personal matter but a social one. The philosopher Charles Taylor has written about countering chronos time with what he calls collective 'kairotic knots'. He argues that festivals and carnivals function in this way. They are not about securing the established order, by sanctioning occasional blowouts to let off steam, as some sociologists have proposed. Rather, they are moments when the chronological ordering of life is suspended, to show that whilst it is valuable, it is not ultimate.

When order and chaos, ruler and ruled, wise and fool are inverted, there arises a kairotic possibility of glimpsing a dimension in which all such regimes are transcended. This explains why festivals have a sacred quality. Rock concerts and football matches echo with it, and they are often highly ritualised occasions that remind people of virtues such as solidarity and excellence. The same experience accounts for why people will pay money to hear live music and see live sport when, in terms of the purely empirical experience, they will see more and hear better on their gizmos at home.

Another occasion for kairotic knots comes when symbolic leaders, who are above the push and pull of democratic politics, catalyse possibilities for healing and rededication. They are able to do so for the reason that they are not subject to the chronos-like transience of election and re-election, but are instead called, appointed or anointed, and so stand for more. Sanctioned by 'the best thing in us', to use Aristotle's expression, or by irrational but aspirational desires only partially understood, they can be felt to symbolise the highest aspirations of humanity, as well as the complex paradoxes of the good.

This is not a call for lifelong presidents or absolute monarchs: corrupt symbolic leaders will exercise powers of tyranny. Rather, and by way of example, consider the meeting of two symbolic leaders who aspire to the good: the visit of the Queen of the United Kingdom to the Republic of Ireland in 2011, following the invitation of the Irish president, Mary McAleese. This coming together was widely recognised as seminal in bringing healing to the Troubles. 'President

McAleese and Queen Elizabeth had the conviction and humility to be leaders, bringing their increasingly secular societies to a place which they could not reach on their own', wrote Donal McKeown, a catholic bishop in Northern Ireland. 'They demonstrated that spiritual intelligence which can take the rubble of the past and make it into foundations rather than a weapons cache'.¹⁸

Chronos time imprisons when it prevents experiences that are transformative, meaningful and resetting. Any revival of spiritual intelligence will acknowledge its value but simultaneously challenge its hegemony – and I suspect that will lead, in turn, to questioning another assumption of modernity, that art, music, philosophy and religion are primarily matters of private, personal concern. Secularity attempts to keep the public sphere free of personal convictions and overly spirited activities. It neutralises, or at least diminishes, the spiritual potency of moments of renewal by enclosing them with reason and bureaucracy, confining them to sanctioned spaces such as galleries and lecture rooms, or humbling them with assertions of the superiority of science.

This didn't happen with premodern festivals and carnivals. They occurred on holy days, which were not passive days of rest but lively days of activity, out of ordinary time. They involved improvised storytelling and journeys of pilgrimage, immersive rituals and personal risk. They were unpredictable and open-ended occasions, welcoming and providing settings for the breakdowns that are the precursor to any true breakthrough. Their point was to offer initiation and paths to visionary destinations.

This can sound riotous and unruly, which at times it may be, though Taylor wonders whether the modern notion of revolution emerged after the Enlightenment because of the marginalisation of kairos and creative chaos. When chronos rules, the only option for renewal may seem to be the total overthrow of the present order and its complete replacement, along with opponents and perceived enemies. Imaginatively, it seems that there is no other way. Culture wars may be a result, with the desire to eliminate another from the social sphere, by shaming or cancelling. Fantasies of apocalyptic breakdown can come to seem inevitable too, and possibly desirable, in spite of the decimating havoc they would bring.

Life and death

The transformational quality of *kairos* can be embraced in another way, which leads to a related aspect of a life in time that is transformed by spiritual intelligence, that of the meaning of death.

The feminist philosopher of religion, Grace Jantzen, describes a renewed relationship with mortality as a growing awareness that the defining experience of the human condition is not death, but birth – not because birth is stressed more than death, in an effort to stay positive, but because the relationship between birth and death comes to be experienced as closely related.¹⁹ This happens archetypically when a child is born. It is a moment that ends the biological intimacy of a mother and child, experienced during the months of pregnancy, though only so as to give rise to another kind of relationship and a renewal of life.

A more general expression of the primacy of birth comes with the realisation that the relationship between life and death is asymmetric, in a way that mirrors the asymmetric relationship between good and evil. Much as the good can embrace what's bad and, though there is suffering, not be lost, so life can embrace death and even be found within death. Indeed, one of the experiences that people can have when they become aware of the approach of death, and start to feel as if they are losing everything, is the unexpected realisation that, in fact, they are not.

Love, for example, can be recognised as transcending death, which is partly why tragedies radiate it. Life may, in fact, be intensified by the proximity death, which is why people talk of having a good or beautiful death. This is also why contemplating death is a common practice in spiritual traditions and stories about death leading to life are important in many wisdom and religious traditions.

Incidentally, this is not necessarily about a belief in life after death, though it may be. Salena Godden's novel, *Mrs Death Misses Death*, is explicitly ambivalent about the possibility of postmortem existence and yet, still Godden notes: 'When writing about Death you soon realise it isn't all about Death and that you write about Life and the living'.²⁰ That's the awakening of spiritual intelligence.

Jantzen called this vision, *natality*, and saw that it is presupposed in many ideas about what constitutes a good life, from freedom and love, to justice and creativity. Freedom is not just freedom from constraints, but freedom for what's good: freedom gives itself to something more

than itself, which is why service can be perfect freedom. Alternatively, as Murdoch remarked: ‘Love is the extremely difficult realisation that something other than oneself is real’ – the difficulty being the death of solipsistic narcissism before the birth of real relationship.²¹

These thoughts are a rediscovery of old insights about death and life, in a contemporary context. They speak to how new life is not born easily but with what, in religious contexts, would be described as metanoia or conversion, which is a letting go to let more in. ‘The good life becomes increasingly selfless through an increased awareness of, sensibility to, the world beyond the self’, Murdoch added.²² It’s an alignment with a dimension of existence that is beyond the purely biological and material, which leads us to the third area of consideration, societal wellsprings.

Falling up

Any society or civilisation needs to be in touch with its spiritual sources, argued the historian Arnold Toynbee. When they aren’t, they spontaneously scramble to find alternative means of sustaining themselves – maybe by deploying increasingly powerful technologies or developing increasingly sprawling philosophical systems. An existence in self-referential, enclosed epicycles isolates people from the life that turns with the love that moves the sun and the other stars, to recall Dante’s famous last line in *The Divine Comedy*.

Toynbee understood this fatigue as arising from the effort a society must expend to sustain itself whilst growing increasingly distant from its ever-present origin. A society caught in such vicious spirals will feel a growing threat of collapse and become paranoid, as it turns in on itself. It will experience itself to be trapped in a metaphysical flatworld from which it seems there is no escape, outside of starting all over again on a different planet or uploading onto an omnipotent computer.

Dante draws out the predicament with an arresting image. He represents a civilisation in a state of decline with what he calls The Old Man of Crete. It is a statuesque, towering figure with a head of gold, and chest and arms of silver. It looks splendid, until closer inspection reveals that its glittering torso is cracked, and its legs and feet are made of broken brass and fractured iron. The old man is leaning on one foot, made of terracotta, which is crumbling.

The image stands for a society that has forgotten the gold and silver of its spirit and soul, and is instead trying to stand on its own two feet, the least valuable part of itself, which are disintegrating under the weight. When civilisations become exhausted, they uncouple from what's more than them. They confuse what's truly valuable with the value they can manufacture themselves. Money, in particular, becomes all important.

When civilisations become exhausted, they uncouple from what's more than them. They confuse what's truly valuable with the value they can manufacture themselves. Money, in particular, becomes all important.

Sometimes only a stark sense of emptiness can precipitate a flip from this anxious possessiveness. It can take a realisation of the extent to which the world has been stripped of meaning to trigger, first, a collapse and, then, the return of awareness – much as death gives way to more life. That requires a return of certain virtues as well – the humility that is really open-mindedness; the generosity to trust in the abundance of life beyond human life – in short, the spiritual intelligence that knows we share in the fabric of being that bore us.

It is a type of education, such as E.F. Schumacher describes in *A Guide for the Perplexed*, when he argues that the divergent problems of the modern world cannot be solved by logic and method, because addressing the world's problems needs higher levels of self-awareness, coupled to higher levels of other-awareness too. This awareness must be treated not as an occasional peak experience, adding colour to the otherwise dull round, but as a permanent mode of consciousness, ready to inspire decisions and actions, individually and collectively. It is about 'love, empathy, participation mystique, understanding, compassion – these are faculties of a higher order than those required for the implementation of any policy of discipline or of freedom',²³ Schumacher continues.

We are not alone in this endeavour. The sovereignty of good calls us, Murdoch stressed, and I suspect that the return of spiritual intelligence will be aided by the growing awareness that human intelligence, in its several aspects, is one amongst many manifestations of know-how and acumen that can be found in the dynamic ecologies of the living world. This pulsing vitality was lost to human awareness with the emergence of modern science, no doubt in part to aid mechanistic explanations and environmental exploitation. But as those drivers lose their appeal, spiritual intelligence will grow.

We should welcome it and actively cultivate it. Much suffering will be lessened if we do. Although spiritual intelligence is far from all we need, it is, in my view, the one necessary capacity that can sustain the transformation of social and individual aspirations now and into the future.

It not only brings an expansion of life without having to consume the world, but trusts the good, even in the presence of evil. It recognises that a fuller life is closely associated with letting go and death, and so can ease existential panic. And it knows that whilst chronos time is required in a functioning society, kairos time is the quality of presence needed to convert mere experience into invigorating vision.

Its return would inform a renewed metaphysical story. And that might offer satisfaction, once more, to the human soul, with its thumotic yearnings for more and meaning.

Endnotes

1 More information can be found at the website of the International Society for Science and Religion (ISSR) - <https://www.issr.org.uk/projects/understanding-spiritual-intelligence/>

2 Penrose, Roger, *The Road To Reality*, Jonathan Cape (2004)

3 Fukuyama, Francis, *The End of History and The Last Man*, Penguin Books (2012), p. 304

4 Retrieved from <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199729920.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199729920>

5 Retrieved from <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199729920.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199729920>

6 The work of Iain McGilchrist offers an explanation of why the body matters: the right hemisphere of the brain, which is crucial for the capacity to maintain an open, uncertain awareness of the world, is more connected to the body and so more responsive to the body's manifold affects and intuitions that are often closely linked to spiritual intelligence. There is a reason 'heart-knowing' references the heart.

7 Miller collects lots of the evidence in her books, *The Spiritual Child*, St Martin's Press (2015) and *The Awakened Brain*, Allen Lane (2021)

8 Retrieved from <https://www.issr.org.uk/projects/understanding-spiritual-intelligence/>

9 McGilchrist, Iain, *The Master and His Emissary*, Yale University Press (2009)

10 'What science can learn from religion', *New Statesman*, 9 December (2020)

11 I am thinking here of what Jonathan Rowson has called a metamodern metaphysics. See <https://systems-souls-society.com/metamodernism-and-the-perception-of-context-the-cultural-between-the-political-after-and-the-mystic-beyond/>

- 12 Murdoch, Iris, *The Sovereignty of Good*, Routledge (1971), p.100
- 13 Heraclitus, Fragment B61
- 14 Aquinas, Thomas, *Summa Theologiae*, Prima Pars, Question 22.2
- 15 MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue*, University of Notre Dame Press (1984), p.259
- 16 Rooney, David, *About Time: A History of Civilisation in Twelve Clocks*, Viking (2021)
- 17 Murdoch, Iris, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, Penguin (1992), p. 295
- 18 Retrieved from https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/ni/2011/05/on_spiritual_intelligence.html
- 19 Jantzen, Grace, *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*, Indiana University Press (1999)
- 20 Godden, Salena, *Mrs Death Misses Death*, Canongate (2021), xi
- 21 Murdoch, Iris, *Existentialists and Mystics: Writings on Philosophy and Literature*, Penguin (1999), p.215
- 22 Murdoch (1992), p. 53
- 23 Schumacher, E.F., *A Guide for the Perplexed*, Vintage (1977), p. 123

PER
SPE
CT
IVA

systems-souls-society.com