



## The Penultimate Curiosity: How Science Swims in the Slipstream of Ultimate Questions

*By Roger Wagner, Andrew Briggs*

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When young children first begin to ask 'why?' they embark on a journey with no final destination. The need to make sense of the world as a whole is an ultimate curiosity that lies at the root of all human religions. It has, in many cultures, shaped and motivated a more down to earth scientific interest in the physical world, which could therefore be described as penultimate curiosity.

These two manifestations of curiosity have a history of connection that goes back deep into the human past. Tracing that history all the way from cave painting to quantum physics, this book (a collaboration between a painter and a physical scientist that uses illustrations throughout the narrative) sets out to explain the nature of the long entanglement between religion and science: the ultimate and the penultimate curiosity.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"This gripping work of history and reference deserves to be read on both sides of the science-art divide. Without espousing a particular faith or denomination, the authors have provided a much-needed antidote to the New Atheists' promotion of science at the expense of spirituality, a campaign that has done much to coarsen and misinform public understanding of both." --*Financial Times*

"Here is magnificence. This book will magnify the heart and mind." --*Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury*

"A stunningly original and wonderfully engaging book, which opens up some of the deepest questions about human identity and purpose." --*Alister McGrath, University of Oxford, UK*

"This book offers a fascinating perspective on the perennial human quest for understanding and meaning. Its two distinguished authors -- with contrasting backgrounds -- have meshed their expertise together to create a thought-provoking and original synthesis." --*Lord Martin Rees, Astronomer Royal*

"Our species should be called *Homo spiritualis* rather than *sapiens*. Asking "Why?" about the world gave rise to Religion, Philosophy, and Science. The interactions and entanglements are outlined in this book of amazing scope and interest." --*Jean Clottes, Senior Scientist of the Chauvet Cave*

"The achievements of science are breathtaking. At times so breathtaking that they cause us to lose perspective on the wonderful created world of which we, the most 'curious' of animals, are a part. This book is a remarkable achievement in that whilst reaching from prehistory, through ancient Greece to the present day, it draws upon the distinctive intellectual resources of a distinguished artist and art historian and a researcher at the cutting-edge of contemporary science. The resulting, beautifully illustrated volume, is a feast of interdisciplinary thinking at its best. It raises profound questions, *The Penultimate Curiosity*, posed for millennia by philosophers, religious people and more recently scientists, and points to constructive answers." --*Malcolm Jeeves, St Andrews University, UK*

"Evidence-based scientific rationality is very good at finding answers to the how questions. How did the Universe evolve from the Big Bang? How does matter arrange itself into objects ranging from atomic nuclei to human beings, planets and stars? But when it comes to the why questions, science does not necessarily

have the answers. Instead of putting science and religion in opposition to each other, we should therefore be asking if dialogue can exist between the two, whether they can respect each other and accept each other's points of view. In the Penultimate Curiosity, Andrew Briggs and Roger Wagner demonstrate that it is not only possible, but also enriching to follow such a course." --*Rolf Heuer, Director General, CERN*

"The sweep of this book is magnificent, with fascinating stories about Paleolithic artistry, Islamic science, medieval theology, quantum mechanics, and an array of topics in between. The writing is spectacular. ... The history, art, and philosophy within this book give it great value to any thoughtful reader. Recommended." --*CHOICE*

"Wagner and Briggs should be commended for the key observation that science and religion are entangled ultimately because human beings themselves are entangled." --*Issues in Science and Technology*

#### About the Author

Roger Wagner has been described by Charles Moore as the "best religious painter in Britain today". He gained first class honours in English Literature at Oxford, and then studied for three years at the Royal Academy before returning to live in Oxford and paint full time. Both The Ashmolean Museum at Oxford and The Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge have his work in their permanent collections. He has produced several books of illustrated poems and translations of the Psalms. Since 2010 he has taught at the Ruskin School of Art. A book about his work *Forms of Transcendence The Art of Roger Wagner* by Chris Miller was published in 2009. His 2012 Gresham College lecture was published on the web <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMb8rIQbTGc>. His new stained glass window was installed in St Mary's Iffley in 2012. He was commissioned to paint the first portrait of Justin Welby as Archbishop of Canterbury, which in 2014 was hung in Auckland Castle.

Andrew Briggs was elected in 2002 as the first holder of the newly created Chair in Nanomaterials at the University of Oxford. After studying physics at Oxford he gained a PhD at the Cavendish Laboratory in Cambridge, where the inscription from the Psalms was placed over the entrance of the new laboratory at his initiative. He then studied for a degree in Theology at Cambridge, winning the Chase Prize for Greek, before returning to Oxford in 1980 to pursue an academic career in science. In what is now the Department of Materials he has been successively Royal Society Research Fellow, University Lecturer, Reader, and Professor. His scientific research focuses on materials and techniques for quantum technologies, in which non-classical superposition and entanglement are harnessed for future applications such as computers and information processors. Simultaneously his experiments also probe foundational questions such as the nature of reality in the context of quantum theory.

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