

Information and Reality: Contributions from the Science and Religion Forum

with Finley I. Lawson, “The Science and Religion Forum Discuss Information and Reality: Questions for Religions and Science”; Niels Henrik Gregersen, “The God with Clay: The Idea of Deep Incarnation and the Informational Universe,” Michael Burdett and King-Ho Leung, “The Machine in the Ghost: Transhumanism and the Ontology of Information”; Marius Dorobantu and Fraser Watts, “Spiritual Intelligence: Processing Different Information or Processing Information Differently?”; Matthew Kuan Johnson and Rachel Siow Robertson, “A Co-Liberatory Framework for Big Data”; Peter M. Phillips, “Digital Theology and a Potential Theological Approach to a Metaphysics of Information”; and Andrew Jackson, “Peacocke Prize Essay—Towards an Eastern Orthodox Contemplation of Evolution: Maximus the Confessor’s Vision of the Phylogenetic Logoi.”

SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE: PROCESSING *DIFFERENT* INFORMATION OR PROCESSING INFORMATION *DIFFERENTLY*?

by Marius Dorobantu  and Fraser Watts

Abstract. This article introduces the concept of spiritual intelligence in terms of a natural human ability to take a different perspective on reality rather than an extraordinary ability to engage with a different/supernatural reality. From a cognitive perspective, spiritual intelligence entails a re-balancing of the two main modes of human cognition, with a prioritization of the holistic-intuitive mind over the conceptual one. From the psychological and phenomenological perspectives, it involves a different kind of engagement with information: slower, more participatory, less objectifying, and not focused entirely on problem solving. The article ends with a reflection on the theological implications of the proposed model and how such an account of spiritual intelligence as knowing differently might relate to theological anthropology and the theology of the spirit and the spiritual.

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INTRODUCTION

The topic of intelligence is becoming increasingly relevant in the field of science and religion because it touches upon profound and age-old questions in theological anthropology: Is human cognition fundamentally distinctive? What are the things that can be known and how do we come to know them? How do we engage our minds in spiritual practices? Can this engagement be characterized as intelligent? Due to recent advances in psychology, cognitive science, artificial intelligence (AI), neuroscience, and animal cognition, it is now possible to gain fresh perspectives on some of these questions. This article aims to contribute to the ongoing debate regarding the nature of intelligence by proposing a new understanding of the notion of spiritual intelligence, which stems from a 3-year interdisciplinary research project pursued at the International Society for Science & Religion (Watts 2020).

Intelligence presupposes engagement with information—whether from the senses, from the body, or from memory. Howard Gardner famously identified eight different types of intelligence (1993), which all make use of information of some kind. When it comes to spiritual intelligence, a question can be asked whether it deals with the same kind of “natural” information as other types of intelligence or whether it operates with information of a different kind, which might involve direct communication with God or spirits, or engagement with other types of information generally inaccessible to the senses. Our main thesis in this article is that it does not, or at least not necessarily. Spiritual intelligence is not necessarily about seeing *different things*, although extraordinary experiences might occur sometimes, but mainly about seeing things *differently*. More specifically, we propose that human intelligence is deployed in a distinctive way in spiritual life, and the notion of spiritual intelligence is a helpful way of characterizing that deployment. After defending this proposal, we outline some of the marks of this distinctive way of engagement with information and reflect on the theological implications of our proposal.

The term “spiritual intelligence” was introduced over two decades ago by Robert Emmons (2000a), as a proposed addition to Gardner’s multiple intelligences. This triggered a lively debate on whether spiritual intelligence truly meets the criteria for being classified as a separate type of intelligence (Emmons 2000b; Gardner 2000; Kwilecki 2000; Mayer 2000). We believe it does not, and a careful analysis of Gardner’s criteria seems to point toward such a conclusion (Watts and Dorobantu 2023). Instead, we

think that spiritual intelligence somewhat exceeds the narrow definition of intelligence as the ability to think logically, learn, and solve problems, which is currently widely accepted. A broader view of intelligence should at least include some traces of its original meaning, rooted in the Latin words *intelligere* and *intellectus*, which denote a deeper and holistic level of understanding.

SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE AS KNOWING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

The account of spiritual intelligence proposed in this article starts by asking whether spiritual or religious knowledge has a different content from secular knowledge, or whether it is more about a different way of knowing the same content. Is it to do with a different kind of information, for example, information from a different or spiritual plane of existence, or is it about engaging with the “regular” type of information—coming from the senses, the body, or memory—but in a different manner? The answer to this question has profound implications for the nature of theology because the question can translate along the following lines: is theology one science among others, studying God and the spiritual realm, just as geology studies rocks and primatology studies apes? Or is it a different kind of engagement with the rocks and apes? This is, of course, a crucial question whose answer is decisive in determining the kind of interaction that can take place between theology and science (Harrison and Tyson 2022).

Whichever way we look at it, it is unquestionable that spiritual cognition represents an engagement with information of some sort. Suppose we allow that most of the phenomena around us—from the rotation of galaxies to the processes of life and human thinking—can be thought of in terms of information processing. In that case, the central question of spiritual intelligence is what kind of information processing is characteristic of spiritual cognition.

The first aspect to be considered is what one means by information processing. There is, for example, a simplistic version of this story, most probably wrong, which reduces everything to *digital* information processing. This theory posits that reality is fundamentally computational and that everything that exists can be ultimately decomposed into strings of ones and zeroes. People who believe this usually also believe that we live inside a computer simulation (Bostrom 2003). If the universe can indeed be exhaustively described as a gargantuan string of digits, the argument goes, then everything that we experience as reality could, in fact, be a software program run on a proportionally colossal computer in a higher dimension.

A weaker version of this idea is that regardless of whether reality ultimately transcends zeroes and ones, our brains are still just very complex digital computers. Here is the logic behind it. Since the 1950s, digital computers have proved capable of solving complex problems precisely by

manipulating symbols that are ultimately decomposable as strings of ones and zeroes. If that is how computers “think,” the argument went, then perhaps that is also how human brains and minds operate, especially since neurons in the human brain fire in an all-or-nothing fashion, not very different from the ON/OFF function of digital transistors. And just as computer programs are written in programming languages, such as C++ or Python, “mind programs” must be written in some sort of ultimate programming language called Mentalese (Fodor 1980).

Although appealing, this idea is historically only the last example in a long series of attempts to understand the human mind in terms of the most advanced technology of the time. We are now using the metaphor of digital computers, but a similar thing happened previously with other state-of-the-art technologies: minds have been compared with telephone switchboards, steam engines (hence, expressions like “letting off steam”), mills, and allegedly even catapults (Searle 1984, 44). The human mind is probably something *else* or *more* than a digital information processor. This became obvious when people naively thought it would be easy to emulate minds in digital computers: by teaching computers enough facts about objects in the world and the relations between them, it was expected that the former would eventually reach human-level intelligence. This approach, known as symbolic AI, largely failed because, as philosopher Brian Cantwell Smith puts it, reality does not come “chopped up into neat, ontologically discrete objects” standing in unambiguous relations—ultimately expressible in zeroes and ones—but it is much messier (2019, 28–36; see also Wales 2022, 162–63). In Smith’s view, the mind’s abstractions and conceptualizations are an achievement of our thinking and make reality manageable at a human scale, but they do not perfectly map onto the world as it is.

But even if human minds probably do not break information into zeroes and ones, their operations cannot be thought of as anything other than information processing, understood more broadly, in the sense described by Niels Gregersen in this special section (2023). Speaking of information processing in the context of spiritual cognition is thus noncontroversial. A key question is whether spiritual intelligence entails processing a different kind of information, or a different way of processing information of the same kind as all the other types of cognition.

There are good reasons to believe the latter is a better way of looking at spiritual intelligence. First, as shown in the following sections, this model better accounts for both the cognitive and the phenomenological dimensions of spiritual engagement. There is no “God spot” in the brain, despite continuous efforts in neuroscience to locate such an area, nor is there a “God module” in the mind. When we engage in spiritual practices or reflect on spiritual matters, we are arguably not using a part of our mind or brain exclusively dedicated to spiritual cognition. Instead, we are

employing the same mental architecture used in other types of cognition, though in a markedly different way, as shown further.

Second, defining spiritual intelligence this way is less opaque to non-theological disciplines than, say, speaking of a *sensus divinitatis* (see Helm 1998). Spiritual intelligence is not about engaging with a different kind of information that is accessible only through supernatural capacities. It is also certainly not the science of God, in the sense of making God an object of study. Instead, it is more to do with a different way of engaging with information, both from the point of how the human cognitive architecture is being deployed and in terms of the kind of attitudes and expectations we have from information and the meanings we ascribe to it. Spiritual intelligence is, therefore, discernably distinct in terms of both how the mind is deployed in spiritual contexts (the cognitive architecture aspect) and how it feels for the human subject (the psychological/phenomenological aspect). Let us take these dimensions one by one and explore what could be characteristic features of spiritual intelligence for each of them.

SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF COGNITIVE ARCHITECTURE

Cognitive architectures are hypotheses about the components of the mind and how they work together to produce intelligent behavior in natural or artificial systems. There is a widely shared assumption in psychology and cognitive science that human minds dispose of two modes of cognition, traditionally referred to as *head* and *heart*: one more abstract/rational/conscious/linguistic, the other more intuitive/relational/unconscious/attuned to the body and senses. Various models of dual cognition have been proposed. Psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist speaks of the left and right brain hemispheres (2009); psychologist Daniel Kahneman proposes systems 1 and 2 (2011); philosopher Hubert Dreyfus talks about “knowing-what” and “knowing-how” cognition (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 2000, 16–51), based on Martin Heidegger’s distinction between “present-at-hand” and “ready-to-hand” (1962); economist Colin Camerer divides them into monkey brain and press secretary (Camerer, Loewenstein and Prelec 2004); social psychologists Jonathan Haidt describes the two modes as an elephant and the elephant rider (2007). There are significant differences between these proposals in terms of focus and details. However, they all converge on the idea that humans dispose of two distinct modes of cognition that are different enough to almost amount to two separate minds.

In our project, we work with a cognitive architecture model called Interacting Cognitive Subsystems (ICS), proposed by cognitive scientists Philip Barnard and John Teasdale (1991). ICS proposes that humans have nine subsystems, up from four, in early mammals and eight, in apes. For all

nonhumans, the cognitive architecture consists of a central subsystem and a couple of other sensory or effector subsystems that feed into it.

The ninth subsystem, the extra one, which only humans supposedly have, is called the Propositional. This is special not only because it enables language and conceptual thinking, but also because it is a second central subsystem. This means that humans have not one but two centers of cognition: the older one, called Implicational, which can be viewed as our holistic-intuitive mind and which we share with many nonhuman animals, and the Propositional, which can be regarded as our conceptual mind.

It is beyond the scope of this article to give a detailed account of ICS. Instead, here are two key features of ICS that are relevant to spiritual intelligence. First, as can be seen in Figure 1, the Propositional does not have a direct connection with the sensorial (Visual and Acoustic) and Body-State subsystems. All information from the body and senses is filtered through the Implicational. The Propositional subsystem's disconnectedness from the body and senses, which resonates very well with McGilchrist's description of the left-brain's isolation, means that the conceptual mind does not have direct access to experience. This insight is relevant in emphasizing the importance of the embodiment dimension of spiritual intelligence, as we argue below. Second, Implicational meanings are usually mediated through the Propositional subsystem on their way to verbal articulation.. This means that our holistic-intuitive mind does not have direct access to verbalization. Instead, it always depends on the conceptual mind to "translate" its insights into concepts and language, with relevant implications for the ineffability of spiritual experiences.

Where does spiritual intelligence come into this picture? A good place to start the quest for spiritual intelligence is by investigating how the human mind is deployed in spiritual practices. To be sure, spiritual intelligence does not only concern spiritual practices but also spiritual contexts in the everyday life. It is just that, in spiritual practices, the features of spiritual intelligence are most salient, and this makes them a suitable place to study the notion.

The ICS cognitive architecture has already been used to model spiritual practices such as mindfulness (Teasdale 2022) and the Jesus prayer (Watts Forthcoming), leading to the conclusion that spiritual intelligence entails a re-balancing between the two minds, with a strong prioritization of the holistic-intuitive mind. Why would the two minds need re-balancing? The assumption is that human life in contemporary post-industrial society relies disproportionately on the conceptual mind or left-brain cognition, which came to be synonymous with intelligence in general (what we measure through IQ). This is also the kind of intelligence we are currently emulating in machines. This is not all bad. The overreliance on the conceptual mind is likely responsible for the scientific, industrial, and

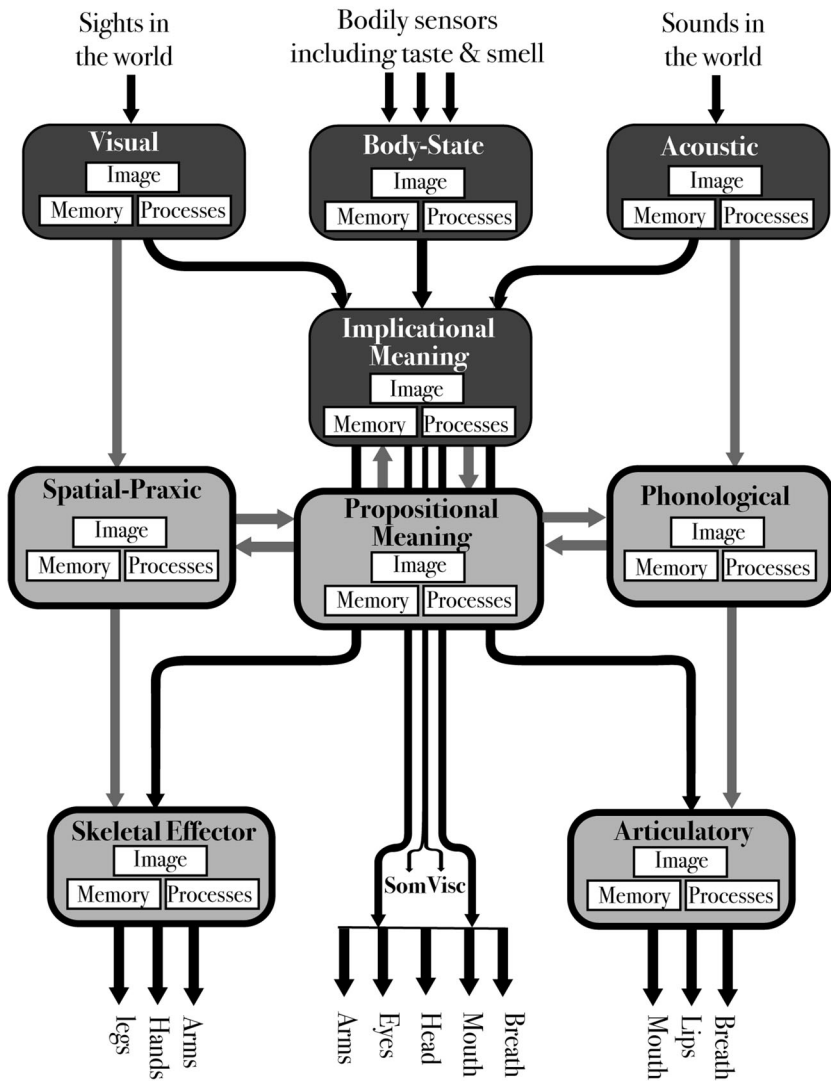


Figure 1. The Interacting Cognitive Subsystems architecture (courtesy: Philip Barnard). Note: the flows out of the Implicational subsystem (in black) go behind *not into* the Propositional subsystem.

now technological revolutions. However, as McGilchrist points out, it is also alienating, because this is not how human cognition is supposed to function. A healthy and fulfilling life entails a general domination of the holistic-intuitive mind, with specific use cases for the conceptual mind. The master (holistic-intuitive mind) should be in charge and the emissary (conceptual mind) should serve the master but in our world, the emissary has gone rogue and instead started to usurp the master's role (McGilchrist 2009).

Spiritual practices have a way of fixing this by rebalancing the two central subsystems and recruiting conceptual intelligence in service of something that is first and foremost understood at an intuitive level (Watts Forthcoming). They involve a more coordinated use of cognitive architecture and, while they prioritize the holistic-intuitive mind, the conceptual mind is certainly not cast aside. For example, when one reflects rationally on spiritual experiences and abstracts from them, this conceptual information gets fed back into the holistic-intuitive mind, affecting how future spiritual experiences are lived and understood. The result of re-prioritizing the holistic-intuitive mind is a shift toward a mode of cognition that focuses more on patterns and relationships rather than entities. To be spiritually intelligent might thus entail a harmonious collaboration between the two minds, with a re-prioritization of the more intuitive and body-related mode of cognition.

Embodiment is an important feature of spiritual intelligence, which comes as no surprise when we think about how important the body is in most spiritual practices. This is highly obvious in the case of spiritual practices that require *doing* something with the body: eating, prostrating, chanting, dancing, and so on. But it is also the case for the more contemplative practices, like prayer and meditation, which at first glance seem to implicate the "mind" (that is, the conceptual mind) more than the body. In mindfulness, for example, the reason why practitioners focus their attention consciously on the body (e.g., on breathing or on the soles of the feet) is that doing this helps prioritize the holistic-intuitive mind, which is better in tune with the body, at the expense of the conceptual mind (Teasdale 2022). In the ICS model of the mind, body-state information feeds into the intuitive-holistic mind but not into the conceptual one (Teasdale and Barnard 1993), so focusing on the body is an effective way of "silencing" the rational-discursive mind to give space for the intuitive.

Watts's analysis of mantra-based prayer practices, such as the Jesus prayer, using ICS led to similar conclusions: posture, attention to breathing, and finger movement on the prayer beads all represent ways to promote the more embodied holistic-intuitive cognition on behalf of the conceptual one (Watts Forthcoming). In mantra-based meditation, this conclusion is even more surprising because the words that are repeated are usually regarded as the core of the practice, and there is ample

literature dealing with their semantic and theological subtleties. However, in Watts' analysis, the literal meaning of the uttered words turns out to be secondary.

Counterintuitively, the role of these words has actually to do more with the body and the holistic-intuitive mind than with the conceptual mind. They are a way of keeping the articulatory and acoustic subsystems busy but without much intellectual engagement with the explicit semantic content. To put it crudely, by uttering the simple words of the prayer, we give the conceptual mind something "to play with," just enough to keep it busy but not fully engaged in complex discursive thought. One possible explanation is something called "semantic satiation," a phenomenon that has been known since the 1960s. It describes how words lose their meaning when used repeatedly (Jakobovits 1962). Another explanation, preferred by Watts, is that the repetition of the words enables a deeper level of semantic processing, performed not by the conceptual mind but by the holistic-intuitive one, which focuses "on the *gist* of the words and the intentions behind them, rather than on each specific word that is uttered" (Watts Forthcoming, emphasis in original). This latter explanation looks fully compatible with the notion of "drawing the mind into the heart," mentioned frequently in the spiritual literature on the Jesus prayer (Bradshaw 2009). From a cognitive science perspective, this movement from the mind to the heart could be interpreted as precisely a movement from the conceptual to the holistic-intuitive mind.

Another feature of spiritual intelligence is the slowness in processing information, as outlined by philosopher Harris Wiseman. He explores the role of slow thinking in spiritual intelligence both in the short-term context of spiritual practices and the long-term context of lifelong wrestling with perplexity and the search for meaning. In the short term, most spiritual practices require and promote a slow approach. Slowing the body down leads to a stabilization of the focus of attention instead of a rapid movement from one thing to another. Slow processing also enlarges the scope of one's awareness, which can be opened to perceive a broader set of meaning-laden information—different levels of meaning, not just intellectual, but several bodily perceived meanings. A more grounded state of mind helps one see past one's usual thinking habits, which is essential for spiritual intelligence. In *lectio divina*, for example, little is achieved if one rushes through the text by scan reading. Instead, reading "is purposefully slowed down, almost to the point of absurdity." This enables the practitioner to unpack very different kinds of meanings from the words, which are "no longer informational, but personal, much richer and much more vivid" (Wiseman 2022, 728). This description resembles Watts' account of how the words of the Jesus

prayer are processed differently when the holistic-intuitive mind is in the lead.

SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE FROM PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Besides the short time frame of spiritual practices, Wiseman also speaks of slow cognition in the long term. With this, we move from the cognitive characterization of spiritual intelligence to an exploration of its psychological and phenomenological dimensions. What does spiritual intelligence look or feel like from the conscious perspective of the human person?

For Wiseman, slow knowing can extend to lifetime scales, as a lifelong wrestling with perplexity. This can mean patiently dwelling for long periods of one's life on matters of profound concern without expecting easy answers. In doing this, the process is arguably more important than the destination, the *how* more important than the *what*: "it is the ongoing deepening of understanding [...] that is at the core of spiritual intelligence more than any series of insights to be accumulated" (Wiseman 2022, 722). This is yet another argument that spiritual intelligence is not concerned with processing a different kind of information but with engaging differently with the "regular" and sometimes trivial information that one encounters on one's spiritual quest.

By slowing the pace of our attention, according to Wiseman, we might achieve a transformation of the relation between subject and object (2022, 741) and a more relational engagement with knowledge and meaning. Relationality is characteristic of spiritual intelligence, and so is a participatory mode of knowing, as opposed to an objectifying one. Relationality is important in at least two ways.

First, spiritual practices are always embedded in the context of cultural traditions. On a superficial reading, some of the ascetic literature might give the impression that spiritual intelligence is an eminently individual feature, something that one forges by overcoming one's shortcomings and negotiating one's way toward tranquility and contemplation. However, the cultivation of spiritual intelligence across various traditions is always exercised and perfected in relationships: with the neighbor who must be loved, the fellow brethren, the ancestors, or the divine. This applies even to the most solitary hermits, who are usually supported by a wider religious community, and are inevitably exploring spirituality within the bounds of a tradition laid out by other people before them. In addition, as explored in detail in the last section of this article, spiritual intelligence is always aimed at nurturing community by intensifying one's altruism and awareness of persons and things outside oneself.

Second, spiritual experience is participatory. There is a strong sense among those who engage in spiritual practices that they are participating in

a transcendent intelligence rather than just performing personal cognitive operations. This is not too dissimilar to what happens sometimes to mathematicians, when they have a sense of discovering something, rather than inventing it, to the point where it sometimes feels that mathematics gives a window into the mind of God. This participatory notion of intelligence may look odd to the modern reader, but it was arguably the dominant view up until relatively recently. We may take for granted the assumption that intelligence is a property of the individual, but this view only came about in the late nineteenth century. Before that, it was common to see intelligence as *transpersonal*, as something people could participate in (Barfield 1953; Wiseman and Watts 2022). This older notion of participatory intelligence might be particularly important in understanding spiritual intelligence, perhaps as a participation of the human mind in the mind of God.

When it comes to knowing God, the participatory, nonobjectifying nature of spiritual intelligence becomes particularly relevant. Spiritual intelligence is not a matter of detachedly knowing a separate being called God with an implicit subject-object distinction approach, but it is about a kind of participation in God that gives an apprehension of the relationship between us and God. This type of nonobjectifying knowing applies to other things as well, and it escapes the objectifying trap through contextualization and a personal relationship with what is being experienced. Spiritual teachers are in agreement that the spiritual world cannot be observed detachedly, but only through participation.

A more contextualized understanding of intelligence would also imply a kind of apprehension of relationships that involves both the individual *and* the context. Human intelligence is more emancipated from the immediate context than animal intelligence because we can do cognitive processing about things not part of the current environment in a way that other species probably cannot. We can imagine places far away that we have never visited; we make plans that stretch far beyond the immediate time horizon, and we can even become depressed by the heat death of the universe in the far future. Spiritual intelligence can be seen to take this emancipation a step further because interaction with God is even more remote from the immediate context of what is conceivable. Through the idea of an infinite God with whom people can relate, theological imagination transcends not only the immediate spatial and temporal context, but also that of what is possible, given the constraints inherent in the laws of nature.

Another distinguishing feature of spiritual intelligence is that it does not neatly fit into the paradigm of intelligence as problem-solving, which is almost taken for granted in the study of animal and artificial intelligence. Intelligence, and especially spiritual intelligence, is arguably not only about problem-solving but also about finding and defining the problems worth solving. The same goes for the view of intelligence as just pattern

recognition (Kurzweil 2012, 4). Intelligence cannot be only about recognizing patterns but also about discerning the kind of patterns it is good to recognize. Schizophrenia, for example, can make one see too many patterns where there are not any. Biological intelligences are pretty good at breaking the world into problems because they have specific survival and reproduction needs. AI, on the contrary, is not very good at that yet, perhaps precisely because it seems to lack the kind of intrinsic *aboutness* or intentionality described by theologian Andrew Robinson in his response to Niels Gregersen's 2022 Gowland Lecture (Science and Religion Forum 2022). AI can be hypercompetent at solving certain kinds of problems, but usually only once its human programmers have predefined what the problems are.

The different way humans engage with problems, compared to AI, may also have to do with seeing infinite games where AI sees only finite games (Carse 2013). As it goes, one does not "win" at relationships. As opposed to AI, humans are good at problems that require continuous engagement and resetting the questions and rules. AI solves a problem through computation upon a very limited and usually unimodal set of data, and that solution to a problem is considered as "completion." But this approach completely misses the issue of *engagement*, which is never complete, especially in spiritual matters. Most problems are not mathematical, where one solves a problem and immediately moves on, but rather the kind of problems that need continuous engagement. Spiritual intelligence might thus entail refraining from trying to solve problems for a while and instead just attending intelligently and perceptively to how things actually are, with the kind of slow and patient engagement described by Wiseman and discussed above.

Spiritual intelligence can also manifest as an ability to see deeper meanings even in trivial things. It entails an implicit recognition of the significance of information and what type of response to it is called for. This can also misfire: one man's coincidence is another man's correlation, another man's epiphany, and another man's conspiracy, which are all meanings. They are ways of attributing agency and features to experience. All information processing involves some analysis of the significance of what is happening. However, it is a characteristic of spiritual intelligence that it places things in a broader, over-arching framework of meaning than most intelligences, and gives more far-reaching answers to questions about the significance of things. Patristic authors like Maximus the Confessor speak about moving from the external appearance of things to the reasons, the *logoi* put by God in creation, as described by Andrew Jackson in another article in this section (2023). Theologically, spiritual intelligence might entail this ability to see things as connected, as parts of a bigger whole built by God. In that sense, it is the ultimate form of pattern recognition.

A THEOLOGICAL ACCOUNT OF SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE

We have argued so far that spiritual intelligence is a different way of engaging with information, rather than a way of engaging with a different kind of information. However, a theological notion of spiritual intelligence must somehow account for the assumption that this world is not everything there is, which is a basic premise of any nonsecular theology. In a forthcoming essay, theologian Rowan Williams provides a fresh and helpful lens through which the proximity of what we call “spiritual” can be thought of in ways that are not wholly preternatural (Williams Forthcoming). We shall take his proposal as a guide for our tentative theological characterization of spiritual intelligence.

In the Jewish and Christian traditions, spiritual intelligence is strongly connected to the experience of the divine Spirit. However, as Williams notes, although what first comes to mind are extraordinary experiences—epiphanies, trance, ecstasy, and so on—these are not the predominant preoccupation of spiritual traditions. Instead, they focus more on notions like the “life of spirit,” which entails a persistent and transformative, albeit more modest, engagement with the gentle presence of the Spirit, rather than disruptive experiences. A true life of spirit looks thus disappointingly less spectacular than the idea of a spiritual guru accessing the transcendent realm through a secret channel, otherwise inaccessible to mere mortals. As spiritual maturity sets in, such extraordinary experiences become less frequent; this storyline is common to mystic accounts from contemplative traditions as far apart as Christianity and Buddhism.

Just to be clear, we do not assume some kind of separation between a “spiritual” world and the everyday world, but rather that they are enfolded together. We assume that divine Spirit is manifest in the everyday world, but also above and beyond. We are also not discounting the contribution that disruptive spiritual experiences can make to human understanding. However, we emphasize the extent to which spiritual intelligence consists of spiritual engagement with the everyday world.

One of the manifestations of spiritual maturity, according to Williams, is an enhanced receptivity “to the reality of other finite beings and to the reality of unconditioned or divine being,” but this can be achieved only through a participative engagement with the information processes that form our reality. Such an engagement does not aim to view things from the outside but acknowledges the connectedness of everything and our part in it.

Williams argues that silencing the conscious subject—which, in a cognitive account, might mean suspending, or at least diminishing, the privileges of the conceptual mind—is an essential condition for the flourishing of spiritual intelligence, understood as “attunement” with the preexisting and all-encompassing reality of the Spirit. Crucially though, this reality of

the Spirit is not “a static other realm.” Growing in spiritual intelligence propels us “not into another world *but into this one*, the world we have not perceived or appropriately interacted with” (Williams Forthcoming, our emphasis). For Williams, thus, becoming more spiritually intelligent is emphatically not about gaining access to a different and exclusive kind of information that pertains to a supervenient level of reality. It is about recovering “a vivid awareness of the ordinary, seen more clearly because less constrained by the fears or illusions of an anxious ego.” Cognitively, this may be seen as rebalancing the two minds, with a reprioritization of the holistic-intuitive mind at the expense of the conceptual. Theologically, it may be regarded in connection with repairing the consequences of the ancestral fall and promoting growth into the divine image.

The idea is common in theological anthropology that a mark of our fallen nature is the dissonance between two voices or desires in our mind, which the apostle Paul labels as “flesh” and “Spirit” (Ga. 5: 16–17). This dissonance is considered anomalous and cannot be characteristic of the redeemed human nature in the *eschaton*. There is, therefore, nothing surprising or controversial about the idea that two distinct voices or minds are competing inside our heads. However, the truly surprising insight that emerges from the cognitive account of spiritual intelligence is that the roles of hero and villain might be reversed between the two. Christian anthropology has traditionally assumed that between the voice of the body and that of the “intellect,” the former is always dubious and prone to be sinful. This was partly due to a problematic interpretation of the Pauline “flesh” as denoting the body—although Paul uses different words for flesh (*sarx*) and body (*soma*)—and partly due to an uncritical reception of the Aristotelian notion that what distinguishes us from the animals—reason—must also be what renders us like God (Dorobantu 2021). The dual cognition model of spiritual intelligence explored so far points in a different, if not opposite, direction. Our more embodied mind—the intuitive-holistic—is instrumental in enabling virtue, relationships, and spiritual growth, whereas the more “intellectual” mind—the conceptual—can lead to egoism, alienation, objectifying and exploitation, if misused (McGilchrist 2009; Teasdale 2022). Spiritual intelligence thus entails a harmonization of the two competing “voices” inside our heads, but perhaps in a slightly different manner than we had imagined.

What are then the marks of this different way of engagement with information and the world enabled through spiritual intelligence? Williams sees them in eminently relational and altruistic terms. Because the work of the Spirit is always involved in nurturing community, growth in spiritual intelligence must manifest as a shift from the egotistic obsession with oneself to an “intensified awareness of, attention to or receptivity to what is not [one]self” (Williams Forthcoming). Spiritual intelligence, therefore, has everything to do with a profound acknowledgement of the reality of

human finiteness and inter-/dependence. In this respect, it can be regarded as the antithesis of demonic intelligence, which is characterized by radical egocentrism, stubborn self-sufficiency, divisiveness, and phantasies of limitlessness.

Three stages seem apparent in Rowan Williams' theological account of spiritual intelligence, although he does not explicitly make this distinction. These can be regarded as either successive stages in the process of spiritual growth, or as different ways of looking at spiritual intelligence with various degrees of theological commitment. In a first stage, spiritual intelligence is a recognition that we are creatures that are neither self-generated nor self-sustaining. We are thrown into a world that we did not make, and which invites awe and perplexity more than certainty and control. When put so, this fact might sound almost trivial, but it is surprisingly difficult to grasp for the conceptual mind. In fact, realizing this is becoming even more of an uphill struggle every day, as the world becomes increasingly more of our making through our technology-enabled control, and as we become increasingly alienated from the natural communities in which our ancestors evolved and in which the human psyche can best flourish. Spiritual intelligence must start with the spiritual awakening from our illusory control, independence and self-importance.

In a second stage, spiritual intelligence entails the cultivation of our receptivity to the world as it is: a web of processes and relationships that we are inescapably a part of and can never completely step out and analyze dispassionately from the outside. As our receptivity gets refined—through the reframing of the mind and the rebalancing of the two modes of cognition—we start grasping deeper meanings in the world around us and begin to understand what is called for in our interactions with it. The realization of our connectedness with other humans and nonhumans, or of the “pre-existing solidarity with what is not [our]self,” as Williams aptly calls it, begins to take precedence over our selfish preferences when it comes to informing our actions. We also become increasingly aware, though perhaps not in an articulate way, of the invisible pull of the Spirit and the subtler patterns that surround our existence.

The final stage of spiritual intelligence could be envisioned, with Williams, as the level where one has significantly grown into “the life of trinitarian unity-in-distinction—into becoming a ‘child’ of the eternal Source and a ‘word’ of the eternal mind.” Concretely, supreme spiritual intelligence, understood in Christian terms, implies a kenotic and authentically empathetic approach to relationships, which

has to do with acknowledging the seriousness of the experience of the other, attending to it with intelligence and patience, connecting this with my concerns for my own welfare so that such concerns are radically reshaped, and acting in awareness of this connection. The experience of the other genuinely ‘in-forms’ my own; not so that I am magically able to know what the

other experiences as they know it, or so that I am able to absorb that alien experience into my own story and self-representation, but so that I accept the impact or impress of that otherness on my account of myself without destroying its otherness. (Williams Forthcoming)

This way of engaging with “the other”—whether that might be another human person, animal, the environment, or God—is arguably an uplifting and theologically appealing account of how spiritual intelligence enables processing information *differently*.

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