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The origin of the universe is described differently in scientific cosmology, in the literal and Gnostic interpretations of Genesis, and in the creation hymn of the Vedas. The story of Abraham and Isaac illustrates both the problems and benefits of scriptural interpretation. Evolution through natural selection provides a compelling explanation for the present state of life on earth. The human anatomy shows structures that cannot easily be explained by a separate creation. The theory of evolution is nevertheless still a work in progress. Issues concerning purpose and the special nature of human consciousness are yet unresolved. Human beings differ from other animals in their highly developed ability to create new solutions for old problems and to store and communicate information. The chapter concludes with the idea that we must create our own interpretations of how to interact with the forces that made us who we are.

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The conflict between science and religion is introduced by the story of Galileo. Science proposed that we should determine what is real by considering the empirical evidence rather than by literally interpreting the Holy Scriptures. This point of view has prevailed for our understanding of the material world. However, there are limitations to empirical knowledge. Since inference involves as much conjecture as deduction, scientific theory is never absolutely certain. Colors illustrate how our perception of reality is determined by the physics of the world, the physiology of our senses, and the experience of our culture. Quantum physics has brought us face to face with a level of reality that cannot be completely predicted. Subatomic particles are not separate from each other and show different characteristics depending on how they are measured. Nevertheless, there is an order at the heart of things, without which there would be neither science nor religion.

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Modern psychology postulates that human consciousness is a creative and interactive system that constructs a model of a lawful world, attributes minds to others, and creates a self upon which to base a personal narrative. Truth is determined by the brain's belief systems, which involve complex neuronal networks and many different

neurotransmitters. Social forces often make belief more a matter of solidarity than of reason. Just as perception makes a model that explains the world we experience, so religious belief creates a purpose for our existence, often attributing this to a divinity. The human brain has many different states of awareness. Meditation combines aspects of both sleep and wakefulness. Inward thinking often deals with matters beyond the reach of perception. Our intuitions of the transcendent (or the manifestations of the divine) vary from one culture to the next. Science adapts its theories as new information becomes available, whereas religion defines its truth in doctrines, denouncing other beliefs as heresy. Yet many religious parables remain elusive to definitive interpretation.

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Scientific determinism leaves no place for freedom of the will, even though such freedom is essential to human morality. However, just as physical determinism does not work in the subatomic world, so biological determinism may not work at the level of complexity represented by the human brain. Physiological experiments purporting to demonstrate that human consciousness only occurs after the brain has already made decisions about how to act are reviewed and criticized as being inappropriately dualistic. Human morality is centered on the ideas of compassion, justice and wisdom. Religion proposes these in the form of divine instruction, whereas science says such laws were learned so that human society could survive in a hostile world. Ideas of justice and morality lead to politics, where compassion is ever in conflict with power. Justice and morality require that we consider the consequences as well as the causes of our actions. Human principles of justice call into question the concept of a God who does not or cannot prevent needless suffering.

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Death comes to us all. Science proposes that death is the end of the individual consciousness. Grey areas exist on the borderline of death, particularly when breathing is artificially maintained. Nevertheless, when the heart finally stops beating, the body becomes a corpse and enters into decay. The belief that we may somehow survive death runs deep in human thought. The immortality of the soul leads to ideas of resurrection in the West and of reincarnation in the East. In both, death comes with judgment. Our lives determine whether we are bound for heaven or condemned to hell, whether we escape from continual rebirth or return. Science says these ideas are fanciful. Yet science knows not what will happen when the stars go out and reality is no more. Perhaps

we may escape from mortality by understanding ourselves, contributing to human knowledge, and thereby becoming part of a more general consciousness.

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