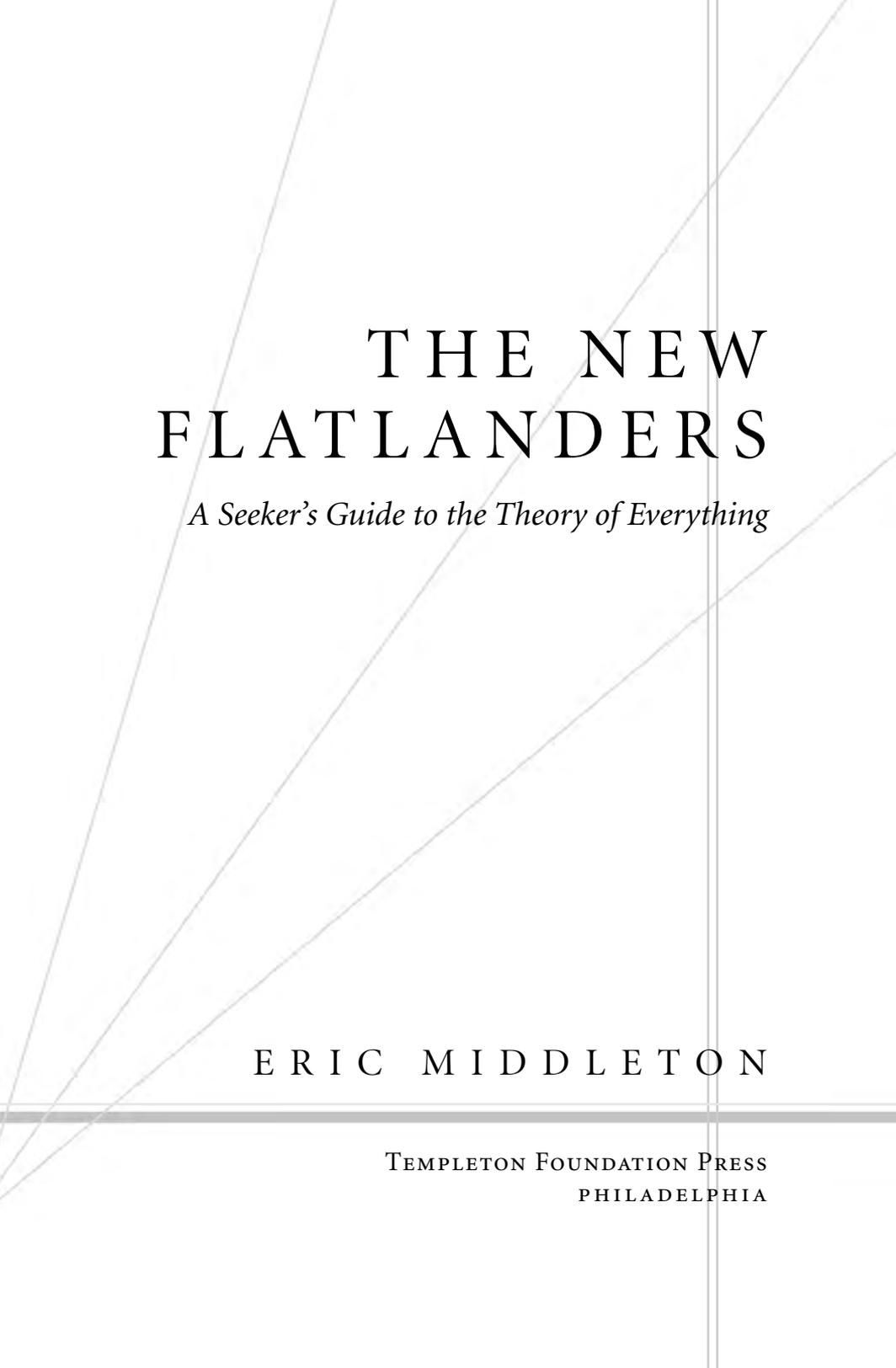


The New Flatlanders

The background of the cover features several thin, light gray lines. Two diagonal lines intersect at the top left, extending towards the center and right. A vertical line runs down the right side of the page. A horizontal line runs across the bottom third of the page, intersecting the vertical line.

THE NEW FLATLANDERS

A Seeker's Guide to the Theory of Everything

ERIC MIDDLETON

TEMPLETON FOUNDATION PRESS
PHILADELPHIA

Templeton Foundation Press
300 Conshohocken State Road
Suite 670
West Conshohocken, PA 19428
www.templetonpress.org

2007 Templeton Foundation
Press Edition

Originally Published by Highland
Books, Surrey, UK, 2002
© 2002 by Eric Middleton
Eric William Middleton has asserted
his right under the Copyright, Designs,
and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified
as Author of this Work.

All rights reserved. No part of this book
may be used or reproduced, stored in a
retrieval system, or transmitted in any
form or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording,
or otherwise, without the written per-
mission of Templeton Foundation Press.

Templeton Foundation Press helps intel-
lectual leaders and others learn about
science research on aspects of realities,
invisible and intangible. Spiritual reali-
ties include unlimited love, accelerating
creativity, worship, and the benefits of
purpose in persons and in the cosmos.

Designed and typeset by Gopa & Ted2, Inc
Fractal image on back cover courtesy of Brad Johnson

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Middleton, Eric.

The new flatlanders : a seeker's guide to the theory of everything / Eric Middleton.
— Templeton Foundation Press ed.

p. cm.

Originally published: Surrey, UK : Highland Books, 2002.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-59947-123-5 (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Religion and science. 2. Science—
Miscellanea. 3. Apologetics. I. Title.

BL240.3.M53 2007

215—dc22

2007005769

Printed in the United States of America

07 08 09 10 11 12 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This book is dedicated to all those who were willing to become “Flatlanders,” who enriched us with their sharing and who encouraged me to write this book.



Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction	3
1. The Universe and Beyond: How Did It All Begin?	7
2. Mystery, Models, and Quantum Theory	19
3. Quarks, Superstrings, and M-branes: A Theory of Everything for the Twenty-first Century?	30
4. What Is Reality?	40
5. The Story of Flatland	45
6. The Anthropic Principle	59
7. Evolution: Where Do We Fit In?	67
8. Consciousness and What Comes After	81
9. Miracles and Missions	92
10. Chaos and the Hidden Order	104
11. But Why? The Problem of Evil	115
12. The View from Here	127
13. M-theory in Eleven Dimensions: The Spiritual Universe	134
Glossary	145
Notes	151
Index	161



Acknowledgments

MY THANKS ARE DUE to all who were willing to become “Flatlanders.” It was their story that they asked me to write, and that spread out in circles to many others. These successive enquirers came to unwrap the mystery in their own way. Yet the pattern proved remarkably similar for students of all ages, prisoners and titled folk, young and old. The “Flatland” name came from a nineteenth-century parable-story.

My grateful thanks must be given to Isobel Stevenson for her careful editing of the text.

I am most grateful to St. John’s College, Durham University (Principal the Reverend Dr. David Wilkinson) for its continuing support and encouragement ever since my time as a Fellow of the College.

The New Flatlanders



Introduction

The view from the stone circle

ANGUS LENT BACK comfortably against the warm stone. “You know, here’s something really weird about this place. Once when I was up here, it started pouring with rain, but as soon as I got outside the stone circle it was quite dry. And that ley line across the field—why doesn’t the snow settle there and why do the sheep line up around it the way they do?”

Melissa nodded. “I’ve heard that horses and dogs won’t come near here, unless you force them to.”

But Richard, as usual, was skeptical: “Come off it. It’s just a set of markers put up around an old plague pit, or maybe even just a bunch of rocks on the side of a hill.”

“It’s got to be more than just rocks,” said Ruth. “There is a pattern to the way they’re arranged. If you look carefully, you can even see what might be some sort of avenue of stones leading to that spring down there. Probably this was some sort of shrine, where they carried out sacrifices—maybe even human ones! I am so glad that science has disproved everything to do with religion, so we can come up here without risking having our throats cut!”

“So what you’re saying is that ‘it’s just rocks that humans messed with,’” protested Melissa. “But then why do Angus and I feel strange things here? Science doesn’t have all the explanations—it can’t explain how my Ouija board and Tarot cards work, but they really help me make decisions.”

“Like when to put in another nose ring or change your hair color again,” teased Angus.

“Not fair,” interrupted Richard. “She means more than that. And there are weird things that happen. Watch this.” He hauled out a length of wire that he had twisted into an L-shape. “Watch.” He walked slowly across the stone circle, holding the angle of the L loosely in his hands. The ends of the wire dipped as he approached the center.

“You moved your hands,” said Angus.

“No, I didn’t. Try it yourself.”

“OK.” Angus took the rod carefully in his hand, holding it the same way Richard had done, and set off across the circle. Suddenly the wire twisted down.

“Oh, please let me try,” cried Melissa. She too felt the wires turn in her hand as she approached the center, and returned glowing to the group sitting in the shade of one of the stones. “It works,” she said. “You saw it. That’s an ancient power, more than science.”

“Not necessarily,” said Richard, folding up the rod and returning it to his pocket. “Science is also ‘an ancient power,’ if you think about it, and scientists can measure what we felt there. I’ve heard that at the Rollright Stones near Oxford they did find differences in the electromagnetic potential at some places in the circle—though they don’t know why yet. And some biologists say that stags use their antlers like divining rods to detect water. I don’t know the details of how it works, but I think science will be able to explain it one day.”

“It’s interesting,” said Angus. “Mel and I are interested in all this ancient powers and magic stuff, and you and Ruth think that science debunks it all. We keep having discussions like this, but we never really settle anything. I wish we could argue these things through properly, not just touching on bits and pieces like we do now.”

“I’ve heard there is a guy called Eric who sometimes leads a few seminars on the sort of stuff we have been talking about today. Covers everything from multiple-dimensions to Mel’s ‘feelings,’ the paranormal, superstrings, relativity. I’ll see if I can find out anything about it, and whether it’s worth our doing together.”

.

And that was how our group began.

Our first meeting was a brainstorming session. The students were suspicious of me, because of the large collection of books on religion (as well as science) in my study. They wanted a say in laying out the ground rules for our seminar.

“We do not want to talk about religion,” Richard emphasized. “You know where you are with science. You can touch, see, measure, visualize, test, deal with facts, repeat experiments, and readily prove ideas. With religious beliefs you can never be certain.”

“Yes,” Ruth agreed, but Melissa and Angus seemed a little more hesitant. They weren’t into religion, they explained, but they were interested in the spiritual dimension. How did that fit in with Richard’s view of science?

I agreed with them that “religion” was a word to be avoided, but I suggested that one of the issues we consider was whether there might be more to science than Richard thought. After all, I pointed out, his view of science was rather dated, rooted in the nineteenth century, and he might want to update his thinking too.

Plus, I added, Richard’s acceptance of science was also to some extent a statement of faith. The mathematics involved in modern physics is so amazingly complex that we have to take a lot of what scientists say on trust. They might even find some of the science so weird that they might have difficulty suspending their disbelief when discussing it. We’d probably need to consider whether we might see something similar in relation to the types of things we might call transcendent, things that go beyond the merely physical.

As the brainstorming session continued, it also became clear that the issues the students wanted to discuss were not purely intellectual ones. They had personal worries about such things as life after death—was there anything else? Did we just cease to exist? If we carried on in some other life, what difference did it make to our lives now? What about the feeling they sometimes had that some things were “meant to happen”—how was that possible if everything just happened randomly?

Gradually, the group defined its focus as looking for an understanding of physical reality that would help them cope with the fact that their experience of life involved more than just the physical. They wanted their lives to be more than random examples of biological life arising by

chance on an obscure planet, but they were inclined to think this was wishful thinking—unless there was some reality to the spiritual dimension.

We duly set our course to try and find the beginnings of a working theory of “everything.”

In what follows, I will not present our discussions as a dialogue with particular voices. Instead, I will take the questions that emerged from the group and use them to frame the account of what we learned as we worked together. I brought to the discussion my background in various branches of science and my faith. They brought a questioning intelligence and a willingness to at least consider the possibility that there is more to life than meets the eye.