Spiritualise

Cultivating spiritual sensibility to address 21st century challenges

By Jonathan Rowson

Second edition

PERSPECTIVA

RSA

21st century enlightenment

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Feedback on the first edition

"There is much written on spirituality today, but most of it is about inward, personal experience that does little to engage society, let alone transform it. Spiritualise is a beacon of light in this regard. Not only does it have depth and profundity, daring to face the challenges of spirituality in an increasingly secular world, but it argues that spirituality, interpreted for a postmodern age, is imperative if we want to change the world… It is one of the most sensible and sincere documents ever written in the field. It faces squarely the dilemmas facing spirituality without the structures of religion, and frankly discusses the fragility of spirituality without any organisational or institutional support." Professor David Tacey, Author of *The Spirituality Revolution; The Darkening Spirit and Religion as Metapho*r.

"It used to be common for spirituality to be dismissed as fuzzy, flaky and feminine. That was at odds with the way in which spirituality was becoming an increasingly important resource in healing and wellbeing, counselling and psychiatry, schools and training, environmental action and political experimentation. The first edition of Spiritualise played an important role in closing the gap between perception and reality. It helped clarify what is meant by 'spirituality', why it matters, and what science has to say. It gave permission to take spirituality more seriously." Professor Linda Woodhead, Director, Institute for Social Futures

"This research invites readers as participants to imagine and create radical futures around a new conception of being and becoming human. It thereby gives us some of the perspective we need to systemically reimagine our legacy industrial institutional infrastructure and perhaps even our social model of creating value." Professor Indy Johar, Director, Dark Matter Laboratories.

"The report is rich and provocative…By the use of the word provocative I am particularly referring to the fact that it is not purely descriptive but attempts to reimagine 'the spiritual' and its central importance to human identity and existence. The report also argues in favour of the inherently transformative and challenging dimensions of spirituality." Professor Philip Sheldrake, author of *Spirituality: A Very Short Introduction (OUP) and Spirituality: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury).

"There should be no doubt by now that radical politics needs to be rethought and redefined for the 21st century and the internet age. And this rethinking has to go deeper than traditional climate-threat doom-mongering or even a mere class analysis ever could. It must rather be rooted in spirituality. Jonathan Rowson's soon to be classic text Spiritualise does a brilliant job at presenting and defending the case for political ideology returning to spirituality…" Alexander Bard, Musician and author of *Syntheism: the creation of God in the internet age.*

"Someone once described software development as a process for turning caffeine into code. Government is a process for turning thinking into action. The thinking is changing. It's no longer enough to assume, for example, that increasing GDP leads to richer lives. Spiritualise contains a deep challenge for those working in and for governments, to ground our thinking in what really matters to people: a sense of connection to others, of purpose in life, of realising our potential, and of an approach to whatever lies beyond what we currently understand; as the report puts it, "belonging, being, becoming and beyondness". To act well in a volatile world, we need to deepen the quality of our thinking. Even in the short time since Spiritualise was published, that challenge has become still more urgent." Ken Thomson is a Director-General in the Scottish Government and a member of the UK Civil Service's Leadership & Learning Board.

"Jonathan's work on spirituality with the RSA landed a long overdue and widely called-for intellectual inquiry. I know from personal experience in connection with NESTA and the Institute for Contemporary Arts that the challenge of simply undertaking and completing the process cannot be overstated. There is abundant untapped energy in many people who are looking to bring together the usually-separated phenomena of religious practices, personal development, shared existential challenges and political urgency." Indra Adnan, Psychotherapist and Co-initiator, The Alternative UK. Author of *The End of the Party,* Compass 2016.

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Foreword by Matthew Taylor

The RSA argues for a twenty first century enlightenment. The core principles of the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries – autonomy, universalism and humanism - are still relevant and progressive. But over time these principles have been diluted and compromised; they need to be renewed for today's world and tomorrow's challenges.

In one of my early annual lectures as RSA chief executive I suggested that our idea of autonomy has too often been reduced to possessive individualism. The goal of individual freedom needs to be informed by the insights on human nature and its fallibility that have come from the behavioral sciences. True autonomy is only reached through self-awareness and self-discipline. As for universalism, we need to see that our duties to our fellow citizens comprise not just a commitment to their human rights and social inclusion – vitally important though this is – but also a desire and capacity to empathise with people different to ourselves, even if - especially if - we find their views and choices hard to comprehend. Finally, humanism, the idea that progress should be ordered to increase human satisfaction must be more deeply grounded by a critical debate about what progress and fulfilment mean and about the responsibilities of humans – including to the planet - as well as their desires.

Our commitment to a 21st century enlightenment led naturally to an interest in the insights of behavioral science. From the start we wanted to go beyond micro-intervention ideas like nudging and priming and explore the deeper implications of the relationship between human nature, social reality and meaningful change.

Any proper inquiry into what motivates and inspires human beings will soon confront the spiritual dimension of life, seeing it not as merely an illogical handover from pre-enlightenment times, but rather speaking to an enduring human need. While it may seem perverse for an enlightenment organisation to commit itself to research on

spirituality, in Jonathan Rowson's profound and highly engaging paper the decision received a powerful endorsement.

The first reading of Jonathan's draft for Spiritualise was an exciting moment. Rereading it in this new updated version rekindled that enthusiasm. My sadness that Jonathan has moved on from the RSA is easily outweighed by my pride in this paper and pleasure in seeing his new initiative – Perspectiva - with whom we co-publish this book – go from strength to strength.

It is a rare claim to suggest that reading a think tank output might change the way you think about yourself and reality, but in this case it just might.

Matthew Taylor is Chief Executive Officer of The RSA, a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Social Sciences and former advisor to the UK Prime Minister

PERSPECTIVA

Foreword by Tomas Björkman

For several years I have been involved with two organisations taking a systemic view of the world – The Club of Rome, an international think tank most famous for its Limits to Growth publication in 1972, which continues to grapple with challenging questions about ecological constraints; and the Ekskäret Foundation, which I founded in 2008, that supports a range of social entrepreneurs and cultural change processes concerned with reimagining ourselves and building intentional communities in the context of rapid technological change.

Throughout my experience of hosting social change retreats on Ekskäret island in the Stockholm archipelago, I have observed a fascinating disparity between the objective and conventional language of the formal meetings and the relatively subjective and spiritual language used in smaller informal groupings, for instance after a long working day during the traditional evening sauna. Professionally, people wielded reason and evidence, but when they felt free to connect at a human level they were much more open and candid about the depth of human experience and how to focus on what matters in our lives.

I have learned that systems change is difficult mostly because it is not really a single type of system that has to change. The outer objective perspective, for instance 'the economy', is only part of the story that always needs to be complemented; both by the inside subjective perspective and the shared intersubjective perspective. These three main perspectives are constantly evolving and interacting in a process that I describe in my most recent book The World we Create (2017). For instance, the economy is never just numbers going up and down; it is what money means to us in terms of freedom and

security, how we forge social identity and personal purpose in an economic context, what kinds of metaphors are being used to shape debates and conceal power relations, our critique of conventional metrics of success, whether we might learn to speak of the market as if it were a social construct and not a law of nature, and how the understandable pursuit of economic growth might relate to our denial of limits and death.

This emphasis on the cultivation of perspective taking, and the need to better understand the interaction of these three perspectives led to a range of fascinating discussions with Jonathan Rowson in 2015 and the creation of Perspectiva in 2016. We use the shorthand 'systems, souls and society' to describe the scope of our work, but the souls element is our primary focus, because at a societal level we have become unhelpfully allergic to spiritual questions and that is where we hope to make the biggest contribution.

The evolving character of subjectivity was very well described in Jonathan's first single author RSA report - Transforming Behaviour Change (RSA, 2011). Here a picture was painted of our mind as an evolving complex system, helping to bridge the gap between understanding the world from a natural science perspective and of our lived experience of being human. Moreover, when I first read Spiritualise (RSA, 2014) I was further impressed by the existential questions that confront us all and intrigued by the scope for a secular and intellectually robust approach to these questions that have traditionally belonged to the realm of religion and new age philosophy, but are much too important to be left out of mainstream society.

It is a great pleasure to be able to co-publish this book with the RSA, and to write this foreword. As Jonathan argues in this second edition: "The spiritual dimension of human existence is arguably no more or less than the lifelong challenge to get things in perspective." That's a challenge we all share within ourselves, with each other and for the greater good.

Tomas Björkman is co-founder and Chair of Perspectiva and recent author of *The Market Myth* (2016).

Preface to the Second Edition

Why do you never find anything written about that idiosyncratic thought you advert to, about your fascination with something no one else understands? Because it is up to you. There is something you find interesting, for a reason hard to explain. It is hard to explain because you have never read it on any page; there you begin. You were made and set here to give voice to this, your own astonishment.
– Annie Dillard

My interest in spiritual questions arose from a kind of astonishment. How can we take debates about economic and social policy so seriously when deeper but related questions about the nature, meaning and purpose of life are mostly ignored? Our world is shaped by patterns of power and technology and finance, granted. But is it not obvious that the major challenges of our time have important spiritual elements?

No! Apparently not. It appears to be far from obvious to most people of influence and power that this kind of 'inner turn' is called for. Or perhaps it is obvious, but is seen as too nebulous to act upon or too threatening to countenance. Whatever the reason, for those who feel the astonishment the case has to be made and remade as persuasively as possible.

The political economy that shapes the stories of our lives has a deep relationship with conventional understandings, prevailing purposes and permissible feelings, but that relationship is mostly viewed as part of the setting of politics, rarely part of the plot. When the plot is frenzied, when drama is pervasive and calls for action abound, it is easy to forget that the setting – the context, the assumptions, the norms – is not fixed. To push an inquiry towards spiritual questions is to insist that our setting becomes part of the plot.

This second edition of Spiritualise arose most prosaically from running out of hard copies of the first edition. More profoundly it was a response to the gratitude and encouragement elicited by Spiritualise and a desire to build on it directly. I am also eager to detail how my astonishment was channelled into the creation of a new organisation

– Perspectiva – and how the ideas within Spiritualise have evolved from that new vantage point, which is detailed here in part five.

The original Spiritualise text, which is still available online, was the final report of the RSA project Spirituality, Tools of the Mind and the Social Brain.[1] That project, co-funded by the Templeton Foundation and the Touchstone Trust, involved a range of events and initiatives from 2002 to 2004 that are detailed in the report. For pragmatic reasons, the text of the first edition – parts one to four - is mostly unaltered, but it has been refashioned to read more like a book with enduring value rather than a project report. 'Spiritualise' refers to both editions unless there is a specific reason to refer to one or the other.

Spiritualise attempts to carve out distinctive conceptual space for the nature and value of 'spiritual'. Part one focusses on what we mean by the term and why we need to face up to widespread spiritual confusion. Part two is about how emerging scientific understandings of human nature help contextualise the function of spiritual experiences, perspectives and practices. Part three examines four spiritual touchstones – love, death, self and soul. Part four of Spiritualise is a relatively brief provocation about the personal, social and political significance of spiritual questions and practices; in the first edition this chapter was a holding pattern for conversations that arose during the project. The second edition tries to build on these sketches in a new part five, which contains Perspectiva's analysis of the spiritual roots of complex global challenges and what follows for how we might act on that understanding.

This new preface also offers a useful opportunity to situate the text in relation to recent political developments while reflecting on two familiar terms – I and we – that are used most explicitly in part five, but are implicit throughout and require some context. I also introduce the idea of spiritual sensibility, which is what 'I' think 'we' need to cultivate to survive and thrive in the 21st century.

'I'

One of my main aims for the project that gave rise to the first edition was to find an intellectually robust and politically relevant conceptualisation of what is meant by spiritual that works for those identifying as spiritual but not religious, but also for religious believers and for atheists with spiritual appetite. In my final keynote at the RSA I dramatized this challenge by asking how we might speak to 'spiritual swingers', 'religious diplomats' and 'intellectual assassins' respectively, and I confessed that I saw aspects of myself in each of these heuristic archetypes:

"I've been in those new age shops...I've returned to church hoping to belong again. I've meditated quite a bit, and through marriage I sometimes find myself in In-

dia, praying in temples and chanting to deities to whom I feel no allegiance, but feeling soothed and energised in the process nonetheless. But I've also had moments where the voice of the atheist sceptic felt not only lucid, honest and compelling, but also wise and compassionate…When pushed to describe where my appreciation of the spiritual comes from I describe myself as culturally Christian, psychologically Buddhist, domestically Hindu and temperamentally sceptical." [2]

One of the main things I learned from the inquiry was that this kind of diverse range of influences is not unusual, and it may even be a function of globalisation. However, I also learned that many people who accept we need a spiritual turn to adapt to the world's challenges tend to be much too quick to think that you can supplant religion with a more nebulous notion of spirituality and fill the same functions of providing meaning and purpose and community and solidarity and doctrine and ritual and myth and… need I go on? It is just not that easy to reinvent the wheel. If Spiritualise helps people have a more mature, curious and creative relationship with organised religion in general, I would be glad, particularly those who welcome spirituality only on condition of materialism and atheism; and others who might be open to divine influence but insist they are not religious.

Another thing I learned from feedback to the report was that people wanted to know more about my personal experiences of spiritual life. There is too much to say for this preface, not least that the exacting challenge of being one of two working parents raising a young family makes any kind of spiritual practice difficult, but let me at least say this: There are days where God's existence seems obvious to me, days where the very idea seems absurd, and days where it seems benign and irrelevant. As indicated in part five, I feel our prevailing cultural notions of what 'God' might refer to are both contaminated and underdeveloped. However, one major point of Spiritualise is that we don't need to get stuck on that question, however interesting it might be.

As indicated in part one, we are living without shared axioms about reality. I think that means we have to learn to stop exhausting ourselves trying to persuade each other, and learn to disagree more productively and harmoniously. But deeper than that, as Simon Christmas recently put it to me, we have to develop a richer cultural language about disagreeing with ourselves. Intellectual clarity and moral commitment are welcome attributes in individuals, and closure is often needed for social and emotional reasons. At the same time, we need to develop antidotes to the underlying premise of headline grabbing opinion polls that people always know who they are and what they think. For many, our lived experience is more like an ongoing negotiation over necessary compromises between selves. As the poet Walt Whitman famously put it: "Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself. (I am large, I contain multitudes)." If Spiritualise helps contextualise the cultural battle to better honour that inner plurality and struggle, I would be glad.

The final point about the 'I' that follows is that although my Christianity is still mostly cultural, one impact of the RSA spirituality project was to deepen my appreciation for aspects of the religion that I was unaware of. As a result, I find I am increasingly drawn to churches as places to experience depth, humility, history and to escape the ambient instrumentality outside. I also feel much less allergic to Christian teachings and practices than I used to. Simply by reflecting on what Easter means beyond the chocolate bunnies I appreciate that there is an exquisite darkness at the heart of the Christian story that speaks to all forms of human suffering. Through confronting that darkness the glimpses of grace and transcendence I periodically experience (as billions do) feel not merely enlivening but more like a deepening relationship or homecoming.

I find it tough being an adult, and I have come to see that being human is necessarily about being one human in particular. I find myself thinking about what it means to be always in relationship to something or somebody at a particular time and place, to be utterly unique - like everyone else, to be in an extraordinary body with diminishing resilience, to care deeply and therefore suffer, to know the dignity of self-sacrifice, and to inevitably die. By reflecting on these features of life more fully than I could when I was younger, I can see that the notion that God may have existed once and only once in human form is not a gratuitous notion, though I still don't know whether it actually happened and what it would mean for me if it did. I mention this now because I feel our churches play a good hand rather badly. If Spiritualise helps in any way to reimagine our main institutional vessel of spiritual life in the west, I would be glad.

'We'

When I say 'we' here and throughout, including the new material in part five, I ask the reader's forgiveness and permission. Forgiveness, because the 'we' of a white middle class 40-year-old man living in a developed country is neither exhaustive nor exclusive, but I often write as if it is. Permission, because 'we' is used to include and inspire and expand perspective rather than merely describe. We is always an injunction in disguise, and whatever is lost in analytical precision is gained in rhetorical power.

When I say we I mean it as an implicit rallying call to the world as a whole, seen from my current perspective. I know that is an absurd vantage point, but it is really the only one we can have, and it is one that is widely shared. As the Psychotherapist Carl Rogers puts it, what is most personal is most universal.

More substantively, when I refer to we I am mostly thinking of people in the developed world, particularly the Global North and mostly Europe, who have no particular material problems, but feel at once politically disillusioned and spiritually confused, as I do. Sometimes I am imagining those identifying as 'spiritual but not religious' who don't know what that means for how they should live. Sometimes I imagine secular humanists

haunted by the meaning of incipient ecological collapse and other existential shocks. By 'we' I mostly mean all of us at the mercy of cultural winds; those who wonder whether their roots are deep enough to ground them and if their wings are strong enough to carry them. When we think of 'we' in this way, spiritual matters become shared living questions.

What characterises a spiritual question is that it cannot be definitively answered but it deserves to be continually asked. Who and what are we and how can we know? What are we trying to do, alone and together? What are the boundaries of experience and who is to say? Is there an objective transcendent, and can it be known subjectively? What should we value most? How do we get everything in perspective? What is progress, really?

Are such questions really off the political table? Noam Chomsky is perhaps the world's preeminent rationalist, and hardly the first person who comes to mind when we think of spiritual matters, but consider his statement: "The smart way to keep people passive and obedient is to strictly limit the spectrum of acceptable opinion, but allow very lively debate within that spectrum....".[3]

We don't like to think of ourselves as passive and obedient, but often we do conform within the parameters of an idea of normal that was not of our own choosing. Superficial economic and political debates are therefore lively and pervasive, while deeper systemic and spiritual questions are strictly limited. One of the reasons people are uncomfortable with any kind of spiritual emphasis is therefore not just that it expands the spectrum of acceptable opinion or calls into question the spectrum of comfortable habits and assumptions woven through our day-to-day lives, but that it reveals how we have been co-opted and diminished by the social construction of normality. I see the cultivation of spiritual sensibility as a way to resist that kind of quiet and gradual asphyxiation.

Spiritual Sensibility

A talent for speaking differently rather than arguing well is the chief instrument of cultural change. – Richard Rorty.

The challenge of defining spirituality is notorious and a little bit relentless. Even when we don't want to dwell on the matter, we can't quite leave it alone. I address this issue directly and extensively in part one, but a new preface offers a chance to share a new conviction.

While I think we should wholeheartedly refer to spiritual as an adjective, spiritually as an adverb or spiritualise as an injunction, I now think using spirituality, in that particular

form, is a subtle philosophical and strategic mistake. I stand by everything I wrote about the importance of speaking freely about spirituality in part one, so what follows should be viewed as a qualification for the initiated, not as a substantial conceptual change, or a reason to avoid the terminology altogether.

The complex noun (person, place or thing) 'spirituality' implies something discrete albeit nebulous outside of ourselves – it tacitly points to part of the furniture of the world that we may or may not grasp (eg see, visit or hold). The singular combination of necessary vagueness and unnecessary explicitness is what makes 'spirituality' problematic. Like a ghost in denial, spirituality denatures itself through performative reification. If you compare Christianity there are perceptual and conceptual anchors; texts, history, institutions and some kind of centripetal narrative binding the notion together. You can cobble together such reference points for spirituality, and many – including myself - have tried to, but they remain cobbled.

I still welcome the use of spirituality as a term, and it will remain a linguistic convention, but those who believe a renewed spiritual emphasis is about changing the world and not merely describing it, and moreover – as Rorty indicates above – that speaking differently matters, we should use the complex noun as little as possible. [4]

It takes courage to recognise, value and defend features of the world that are not tangible in their nature, function or importance. Spiritual experiences and perspectives do not refer so much to discrete things, but rather to, inter-alia; the defining background, the fullest context, the mysterious whole, the sublime perspective, the meta-relationship, the forsaken in-between, the necessary direction, the ultimate meaning, the exquisite tenor, the self-overcoming, the optimal disposition, the ecstatic experience, the sensed affinity between self, creatures and places... We invariably find spiritual qualities or characteristics in relationship to or nesting within something else that matters, so no wonder we often go looking for the thing itself – 'spirituality' - in vain.

Perhaps the tantalising quality of those features of life we want to call spiritual is the reason why the complex noun 'spirituality' feels not merely uncomfortable but also maladroit. Many who are curious to explore what is meant by spiritual as a qualifying notion lose their way when trying to grasp what spirituality is as a discrete phenomenon. I share this contention now in the context of the second edition, because this subtle distinction matters greatly when it comes to the political relevance of spiritual questions which is explored in parts four and five. I believe we need a slightly more refined reference point to highlight the active ingredients we are trying to increase across society. For me, now, that reference point is spiritual sensibility.

Sensibility is about the relationship between experience, sentiment, knowledge and meaning. It refers to the dispositional quality of being able to feel and appreciate and respond to complex and subtle influences. Such dispositions evolve and can be devel-

oped, typically in response to influences that are emotional or aesthetic in nature, but the subtle and implicit quality of sensibility is befitting of spiritual matters too. Sensibility is not a skill or a trait that can be tacked on to an unchanged person; to change your sensibility is to fundamentally reorient or transform yourself.

I think of spiritual sensibility as a disposition towards reality characterised by concern for the fullness of life and experienced through simultaneous intimations of aliveness, goodness, understanding and meaning. Those glimpses of wholeness and integration have a texture that is at once emotional, ethical, epistemic and existential – the feeling of being alive, the conviction that something matters, the intuition that the world makes sense, and the experience that life is meaningful respectively. More substantively, as indicated in part three, cultivating spiritual sensibility is about deepening our engagement with questions of being(death), belonging(love), becoming(self) and beyondness(soul).

What characterises aspects of sensibility that are spiritual and not merely holistic or emotional or psychological, or philosophical or systemic or ethical or perceptual or epistemic or existential or cultural or aesthetic or creative…is that it is the disposition to relate to whatever is within and between all these qualities when considered and experienced together, yet defined or subsumed by none of them. Some call that 'whatever' spirit, but it can also be thought of as life as such, or perhaps just relationships between things seen in their fullest, broadest and deepest possible context.

The reason I care about spiritual sensibility is that in a fragmented and overly instrumental world we need to fight for the intrinsic value of experiencing reality as a whole, the relationships that comprise it, and the diverse and often implicit understandings needed to appreciate it. As argued more fully in the new material in part five, what we need is not the provision of spirituality, as if offering a new cultural product or service. What we need is a purposive vision of individual and collective spiritual growth and renewal that emerges in response to the world as we find it, and evolves in response to the world we seek to create. Questions about the nature, value, meaning and purpose of life as such are matters of fundamental concern and should be aired publicly, which means those who value spiritual sensibility need to find their voice, and their power. [5]

In a recent blog post my friend, the Philosopher Jules Evans, author of The Art of Losing Control, who was instrumental in building the network for the original RSA spirituality project, expressed some disquiet not for these ideas exactly, but for this kind of measured approach:

"I welcome the emergence of a more critical, scientific spirituality. But it tends to be carefully policed – don't talk about the soul, spirits or the afterlife. Don't let any of the hairier bits of spirituality protrude from that respectable white coat." [6]

I take the point, but pragmatism is not the same as censorship. I am all for people speaking about the uncanny, ecstatic, sublime and inexplicable. You can talk to me about shamanic rituals, Ayahuasca or your latest encounter with the IChing. I don't want to explain it all away. I don't even want to explain the idea of God away. But I don't want spiritual life to remain a niche and transgressive escape from the world either. To paraphrase President Lyndon Johnson, I would like to have spiritual seekers outside society looking in and inside society looking out.

I believe emphasising the cultivation of spiritual sensibility helps with that inclusive objective. The aim is not extraordinary experiences for those who have the time and inclination, however luminous they are. The greater ambition is to help initiate and spread the liberating work of fundamentally reorienting our disposition to ourselves, each other and the world as a whole. In essence, I have come to think that promoting 'spirituality' is mostly an understandable but unimaginative response to God's resolutely tentative existence. Cultivating spiritual sensibility, on the other hand, is a meaningful response to the world's increasingly urgent needs – mostly because it highlights what we share and what we need to develop.

For pragmatic reasons, the material in parts one to four still refers to spirituality, but the change in the sub-title of this second edition from 'revitalising spirituality' to 'cultivating spiritual sensibility' is not merely cosmetic. As indicated more fully through the idea of *Bildung* in part five, I think spiritual sensibility is what we need to enrich and expand the spectrum of acceptable opinion and worthwhile debate about how we change the world. The following four examples give an indication of what it would look like for our major public debates to be more informed by spiritual sensibility than they currently are. In each case forms of spiritual sensibility are required to appreciate the implicit, the unsayable, the whole and the hidden relationships that comprise it.

The Real World?

Perhaps our irresolute response to climate change is not just about failure to agree a robust price for carbon, but because of our shared denial of death – another open secret. Like the slow burning existential threat of a warming world, death is inexorably coming towards us, and we are implicated in its arrival. Such a fate must be avoided at all costs – in the first instance by not thinking or talking about it. A society with greater spiritual sensibility would connect these issues more deliberately and more publicly. [7]

And could it be that our morbid fascination with President Trump is not just enduring disbelief that he was elected or daily amusement at his tweets. In his intense self-absorption, his craving for attention and approval, his ambivalence to any reality beyond his own, perhaps he represents our shadow in Jungian terms – the darker part of us we are dimly aware of but don't want to acknowledge. Except this time, because he is

ostensibly the most powerful person in the world, we can't look away. A society with greater spiritual sensibility would focus more on this enduring issue and less on the outrage of the day.[8]

 And those living through the EU referendum in the UK know that the ubiquitous slogan 'Take back control' may have been instrumental in the victory of the Leave campaign, but are we really open to understanding why? Perhaps it wasn't merely catchy and memorable but worked because it reached people in their fullest possible context, connecting the macroeconomic to the psychoanalytic – as Sociologist Will Davies put it. How cunning to make people vote on a supranational institution that they barely know through the lens of personal anxiety that they know only too well. And perhaps 'Brexit' even reflects a deep-down wish, in a market society that has insisted that it has no alternative, to break things up, tear institutions down, achieve a catharsis of pent-up frustrations, even at the risk of social crisis and conflict? A society with greater spiritual sensibility would focus more directly on the experience of alienation and anxiety as a cultural question, not merely attend to their presumed social and economic causes, or displace those cultural challenges by focussing on technocratic questions of what follows for the UK's membership of the European Economic Area.[9]

 More broadly, the perceived political necessity for economic growth has been shown by Tim Jackson amongst others to be highly questionable, but it has a sacred quality, as if to query that is to risk the whole cultural fabric unravelling. The heart of the challenge is what Jackson calls 'the social logic of consumption'.[10] Recent research on 'Human Givens' has deepened our understanding of the emotional aspects of social logics. As human beings as such - rather than any particular human culture or epoch - we have emotional and social and psychological needs relating to, for instance, identity and status, belonging and control. Consumerism meets most such needs most of the time for many people, even if it doesn't do it well, and causes enormous collateral damage.[11] Consumerism may be ecologically insane, it may not give us enduring wellbeing, and it may even be fundamentally deluded, but consumerism has a coherent logic that connects economic structure to social psychology, and anything that replaces it will have to create an alternative logic of its own – a logic that has to be grounded in the fundamental relationship between our inner and outer worlds.

 Those emerging social and cultural logics are the fruits we need and seek to build a better world, but those fruits stem from spiritual roots that need to be known and cultivated, which is what *Spiritualise* is all about.

Background and purpose of the RSA's two year project

Spirituality, Tools of the Mind and the Social Brain

"We all see our lives, and/or the space wherein we live our lives, as having a certain moral/spiritual shape. Somewhere, in some activity, or condition, lies a fullness, a richness; that is, in that place (activity or condition), life is fuller, richer, deeper, more worthwhile, more admirable, more what it should be. This is perhaps a place of power: we often experience this as deeply moving or inspiring."
- Charles Taylor[14]

The RSA's Social Brain Centre (c2011-2016) sought to improve public awareness of how prevailing understandings of human nature, need and aspiration shape practice and policy. The general shift in perspective that informed our work was the awareness that human beings are much less self-determined, conscious and cognitive and much more social, unconscious and embodied than we typically assume in most walks of life. The centre's work in a range of policy domains – including climate change and educational inequality - was about 'behaviour change' but looked, as we do here, at human behaviour outside of a neo-behaviourist paradigm, from as a wide a range of perspectives as possible.

Spirituality, Tools of the Mind and the Social Brain was a two year project funded by the John Templeton Foundation and the Touchstone Trust. The project's main aim was to examine whether new scientific understandings of human nature might help us reconceive the nature and value of spiritual perspectives, practices and experiences. Our objective was to help give the idea of spirituality improved intellectual grounding, so it could speak more directly to issues of shared personal and public concern.

The project comprised a literature review on how new conceptions of human na-

ture might inform spirituality; a Student Design Award called 'Speaking of the Spiritual'; four research workshops by invitation – on spiritual commitment, experiences, practices, and spirituality's place in the public realm; 6 public events - on belief, the body, death, the soul, love, and the political dimensions of the spiritual; and this final report attempts to synthesise those diverse forms of input and research as a legacy document, to capture the contributions of around three hundred people who gave substantive insights at various stages of the project.[15]

The inquiry was not geographically bounded and included perspectives from a range of countries and traditions, but the UK was the default reference point. Spirituality has universal foundations and relevance, but the challenge of how we conceive of it and speak of it seem particular to the cultural and institutional conditions of a formerly imperial, European capitalist democracy in the Anglosphere. The UK is much less conventionally religious than the USA, and intellectually more empirically driven and less theoretically-inclined than much of continental Europe, but significant connections between church and state remain, politically and educationally, and the public conversation about spirituality in public life has often focussed on questions at that relatively unedifying level.

The research methodology was neither an empirical inquiry into the understanding of spirituality in the population as a whole, nor an expert testimony into the nature of spiritual experience and practice, both of which have been widely researched.[16] The pragmatic approach was to involve people who would best help us achieve our aim and objective, through their participation in the workshops or as speakers at the project's public events.[17]

Our inquiry was motivated by the fact that, while survey data is not clear, many if not most people appear to self-identify as being in some way 'spiritual', without quite knowing what that means. Moreover, many seem to recognise that the world's major problems have 'spiritual' elements that are not adequately acknowledged or addressed, partly because we don't seem to know how to conduct the debate at that kind of fundamental level. The project therefore aims to make the exploration of deep and difficult features of human existence bigger parts of our public and political conversations. For instance:

Scratch climate change confusion long enough and you may find our denial of death underneath; we are terrified by an unconscious awareness of an existential threat, and we may need to look at climate change on those terms to really deal with it.[18]

Look deeply into unfettered capitalism and there seems to be a deluded self, scrambling to make itself real; buying itself into existence, until it finds it is fading again, until we buy some more. But we give little thought to the inherent fragility and virtuality

of this self, and speak little of how to work towards its integration and transcendence.[19]

Pay attention to the myriad addictions of apparently normal behaviour and what passes for everyday consciousness begins to look like a low-level psychopathology; we are literally caught up in our smart phones, our social medicines, our curated identities, but perhaps none bring deep satisfaction in the way that gradual mastery of consciousness through spiritual practice can.[20]

And reflect on the epidemic of loneliness in big cities and you sense that love has lost its way. We are all surrounded by strangers who could so easily be friends, but we appear to lack cultural permission not merely to 'connect' – the opium of cyberspace – but to deeply empathise and care.[21]

These ideas, and more, are contextualised and developed below. This spiritual perspective matters now because the challenge of finding a more substantial and grounded public role for the spiritual arises in the context of a weakening of public institutions, acute ecological crises, and widespread political alienation and democratic stress.

And yet, as things stand, without the forms of tradition and institutional support afforded by religion, it is hard to see how the spiritual could be anything other than a private matter. With only a shallow engagement in the subject, we risk 'branding' the spiritual as something insubstantial and completely distinct from religion rather than something important that stands in critical relation to it. Our collective understanding of spirituality is oblique, nebulous and fissiparous when we need it to be fundamental, robust and centripetal.

It feels implausible to imagine we will return to religion in its current form en masse, so we are in this curious post-secular state where socially and politically we need the emphasis on solidarity, practice and experience previously found in religion to defend the integrity of the public realm, but culturally and intellectually we can't go back if the condition of entry is adhering to beliefs that we don't identify with.[22]

This book therefore seeks to reimagine the spiritual with an argument in five main parts:

1) Spirituality is ambiguously inclusive by its nature and cannot be easily defined, but at heart it is about the fact that we are alive at all, rather than our personality or status; it's about our 'ground' in the world rather than our 'place' in the world. It is possible and valuable to give spirituality improved intellectual grounding and greater cultural and political salience. The primary spiritual injunction is to know what you are as fully and deeply as possible.

2) Some recent developments in a range of sciences do significantly help to contextualise the nature and value of spiritual perspectives, experiences and practices.

We selected six:

- Our deeply social nature highlights that 'beliefs' are not propositional.[23]

- Cultural cognition helps explain why the sacred won't go away.

- Automaticity reveals why the spiritual injunction to 'wake up' matters.

- Embodiment sheds light on the widespread experience of meaning.

- Our divided brains contextualize the need for perspective and balance.

- Neural plasticity indicates why we need to take spiritual practise seriously.

3) Spirituality struggles to differentiate itself from religion on the one hand, and well-being on the other. To become a viable part of public discourse, it needs distinctive terrain that goes beyond emotions but doesn't collapse into ethics or aesthetics. Our inquiry led us to four main features of human existence that help clarify this process, and unpack what it means to say the spiritual is about our 'ground' not our 'place':

- Love – the promise of belonging

- Death – the awareness of being

- Self – the path of becoming and transcendence

- Soul – the sense of beyondness

4) We need the spiritual to play a greater role in the public realm, because it highlights the importance of connecting personal and social and political transformation. Spirituality already informs various spheres of public life in subtle ways, for instance, addiction, psychiatry, nursing, education and social and environmental activism.[24] The overarching societal role of spirituality however is to serve as a counterweight to the hegemony of instrumental and utilitarian thinking. At an economic level, that means intelligently critiquing the fetishisation of economic growth and global competition. At a political level, it means that citizens need to be the subjects of social change, not just its objects, with spiritual perspectives playing a key role in shaping and expressing the roots and values of democratic culture. Within organisations of all kinds, the spiritual deepens our vision of intrinsic motivation and gives structure and texture to human development and maturation.

5) We need to work at the level of the heart, the mind and the soul, but we cannot afford to feel alienated from capital, technology, political power, policy detail, and competition. That means we have to try to think and feel and act at a high level of abstraction, without losing sight of details or intuitions. We use the term 'imaginaries' to

capture this level of analysis, which Philosopher Charles Taylor calls 'a wider grasp of our whole predicament'. To make sense of our current imaginary, I introduce the crisis we have to contend with, the ideological context of that crisis and the meta crisis that lies within it. To understand how we might shift the social imaginary, or construct a new one, I introduce some conceptual tools that amount to a form of applied spiritual sensibility, including the old Germanic idea of *Bildung* which is about forms of meaningful personal growth that arise in response to our social predicament.

The writer Marilynne Robinson captures the underlying motivation of what follows in the remainder of this book:

"I want to overhear passionate arguments about what we are and what we are doing and what we ought to do...I miss civilization, and I want it back."[25]

Part One

Facing up to widespread spiritual confusion

*"We do not have any clear, common and simple relation to reality and
to ourselves...that is the big problem of the Western world."*
-Martin Heidegger[26]

Part one aims to give an overview of what it means to describe our cultural condition as 'post-secular' and clarify where spirituality fits in that context. It unpacks the connections between spirituality and religion on the one hand, and spirituality and well-being on the other. This section also argues that spirituality is a phenomenon and term worth fighting for, not in spite but because of some of the awkwardness it gives rise to. Some of the main features of spirituality –meaning, self-transcendence, transformation, the sacred - are presented, and it is argued that the role of the spiritual is to challenge the significance of our 'place' in the world (our identity and personality) and highlight the importance of our 'ground' (being human).

Who needs spirituality?

"I don't believe in God, but I miss him" – Julian Barnes[27]

Debates about secularisation are fierce and unresolved, and mostly beyond the scope of this book, but it would appear that two things are fairly clear. First, the conventional secularisation narrative about the inexorable dwindling of religion, the universal triumph of reason and the death of God is not happening, and second, it is not at all clear what is happening instead.

Charles Taylor's monumental work 'A Secular Age' offers a useful account of three forms of secularisation. The first is about the gradual withdrawal of religion from public institutions. The second is about a decline in religious belief, practice and commitment,

with some individuals turning away from God and withdrawing from religious community. The third is not about belief as such, but the shared societal conditions of belief, in which "belief in God is no longer axiomatic". This third form of secularisation is not about people no longer believing in God, but a deeper recognition of what it means to have a religious worldview in the context of so many worldviews, when they are often not the easiest to have or defend publicly.[28] As Taylor puts it: "Secularity in this sense is a matter of the whole context of understanding in which our moral, spiritual or religious experience and search takes place."[29]

This project speaks directly to this third form of secularisation, these wavering 'conditions of belief' in which society's spiritual diffusion means there is no shared touchstone to illuminate the purpose of our lives. In this respect 'spirituality' is a typically postmodern phenomenon; there is a disorienting sense of fragmentation but also a shared hunger for a larger framework of meaning and excitement that we may be giving birth to something new.[30]

The reason that this larger framework of meaning is slow in emerging is partly because we appear to be transfixed by the first two forms of secularisation and view society as if one was either religious or not religious, with a limited notion of what either option might mean. Survey findings are therefore confounding, full of question-begging or apparently contradictory information, because they don't acknowledge the third form of secularisation, namely that 'the conditions of belief' have radically changed.

For instance, a 2013 opinion poll of 2,036 British adults, The Spirit of Things Unseen, conducted by the Christian think-tank Theos, highlighted that 59% of people believe in "some kind of spiritual being or essence", but the methodology doesn't allow us to probe for what is meant by this. That would be helpful to know given that even among those identifying as "non-religious," 34% believe that a spiritual being or essence exists. Similarly, only 13% of people (and 25% of the nonreligious) agree that "humans are purely material beings with no spiritual element", but the meaning of 'spiritual element' here is question-begging.[31] A related 2012 study, The Faith of the Faithless, again by Theos, found "over a third of people who never attend a religious service (35%) express a belief in God or a Higher Power," and, nearly a quarter of atheists (23%) and nearly half of those who never attend religious services (44%) believe in a human soul; but what does it really mean 'to believe in a human soul'?[32]

Such figures are dizzying and confounding, and don't really help us make sense of where we are spiritually as a society. A distinction made by Professor Linda Woodhead helps to explain why. Most existing data emerges from assumptions within 'The Old Sociology of Religion', premised on the idea of gradual but comprehensive and inexorable secularisation, but 'The New Sociology of Religion' recognises that the process is far less linear. Sociology of religion emerged in the context of social 'differentiation' in which the core elements of modern society were taking shape; religion was separating

from education and health and political institutions, such that society had more distinct parts with distinct functions. But we now have to recognise the countervailing force of 'de-differentiation', namely that there is cross-pollination across different sectors of society, and such boundaries are inherently blurred:

"You need to have a theory of social complexity to try and understand where religion is in a society and what's happening to it. People often imagine that religion is still a completely separate function…this completely unique sphere of society that you deal with – churches and mosques and…that's what religion is and it's absolutely bounded. Well, religion isn't like that. So de-differentiation is where neat boundaries between different social spheres – like education, law, entertainment - get blurred and fuzzy. And, of course, they were a characteristic of the age of the great sociologists; that was the time when societies were differentiating. But now we're seeing the opposite process, and that affects religion as well as other spheres." [33]

To further compound the lack of clarity, the German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk suggests we can perhaps even go further than recognising societal de-differentiation to argue that there is not really any such thing as 'religion':

"The return of religion after the 'failure' of the Enlightenment must be confronted with a clearer view of the spiritual facts…A return of religion is as impossible as a return to religion- for the simple reason that no 'religion' or 'religions' exist, only misunderstood spiritual regimens, whether these are practiced in collectives, usually church, ordo, umma, sangha – or in customized forms- through interaction with the 'Personal God' with whom citizens of modernity are privately insured. Thus the tiresome distinction between 'true religion' and superstition loses its meaning. There are only regimens that are more or less capable and worthy of propagation. The false dichotomy of believers and unbelievers becomes obsolete and is replaced by the distinction between the practicing and the untrained, or those who train differently." [34]

With 'those who train differently' in mind, Woodhead and Heelas used extensive ethnographic research in Kendal as a case study for the broader contention that there has been 'a spiritual revolution', with spirituality based on personal experience and wellbeing replacing church attendance.[35] In the US, David Tacey makes a similar claim for 'the spirituality revolution', as do Buck and Kay in 'Occupy Spirituality'. [36], [37] While there clearly is a change in our approach to the spiritual, the extent of 'the revolution' is far from clear, mostly because the methodology assumes that it is enough for somebody to call their activity 'spiritual' for it to count as such, which seems to be taking empiricism too far.

Considering all these factors, the main conclusion has to be that we are thoroughly confused about how to make sense of where we are on such matters. Meredith McGuire has even stated quite directly that, as things stand, "We do not yet have

the language or conceptual apparatus for refining our understanding of spirituality."[38] In light of the confusion over secularization, from the outset our project distinguished between spiritual perspectives ('beliefs'), practices and experiences to highlight that whatever the spiritual is, it's not just about what you believe to be true. More generally, it is in the context of such confusion over religion and belief,that it seems timely and valuable to strengthen the language and conceptual apparatus around what we mean by 'spiritual'.

Spirituality needs definition, but it doesn't need a definition

"Spirituality illuminates facets of culture in ways other concepts cannot supply."

- Keiran Flanagan[39]

"What is the purpose of a definition?" -Amartya Sen[40]

Some words are easy to define and operationalize, some are hard to define and operationalize, and some should not be defined or operationalized at all. The RSA project took a position on spirituality that is somewhere between the latter two options. The point is not that you cannot define spirituality, because many have; rather, the question is whether you should, which involves deciding whether what is gained –a shared reference point for analytical traction – is greater than what is lost – the inclusively ambiguous, deliberately discomforting and inherently expansive and elusive qualities of the concept. *As indicated in the preface of this second edition, in most contexts I now prefer to use 'spiritual sensibility' but stand by everything that follows.*

The late Rabbi Hugo Gyn alluded to this tension when he said: 'Spirituality is like a bird: hold it too tightly and it chokes; hold it too loosely and it flies away.'[41] Finding the right balance is no mere academic matter, because a compelling language of the spiritual is the frontline of the battle for a richer and deeper public conversation about what we are living for. In our first public event, former Guardian Associate editor Madeleine Bunting put it like this:

"I don't think this is just a trivial point about semantics, I think the language that we find to discuss these issues is terribly, terribly important. It's probably the most important thing right now, because we have lost contact with this conversation, we don't know how to talk about it, and if we can find a language which really begins to cut through, then the conversation can begin to happen…"[42]

There are always challenges relating to the use of 'we', but this book argues that, despite various reservations, late capitalist democracies like the UK need to fight for the continued use of 'spiritual' and 'spirituality' precisely because the reasons not to use

the term appear to be defensive responses guarding against the subversive qualities of the spiritual.

First, some believe 'spiritual' has too much religious baggage. In our first workshop, while alluding to the close associations of spiritual with religion, Anthropologist Matthew Engelke remarked: "The word spiritual has a history, and that history has a politics". But we can be mindful of history without being hostage to it, and even arch-atheist Sam Harris sees value in retaining the word:

"Many atheists now consider "spiritual" thoroughly poisoned by its association with medieval superstition...[but] we must reclaim good words and put them to good use— and this is what I intend to do with "spiritual."...There seems to be no other term (apart from the even more problematic "mystical" or the more restrictive "contemplative") with which to discuss the deliberate efforts some people make to overcome their feeling of separateness."

Second, some feel the term 'spirituality' is now thoroughly tainted with new-age associations, and the attendant patterns of individual choice and consumption. Spirituality has been described by Giles Fraser as 'religion without the difficult bits for feckless consumers'[43] and by Jeremy Carrette and Richard King more explicitly as "capitalist spirituality" which they argue is "an attempted takeover of the cultural space traditionally inhabited by "the religions" by a specific economic agenda...this concept smuggles in social and economic policies geared towards "the neoliberal ideals of privatization and corporatization applied increasingly to all spheres of human life."[44]

These associations are an important challenge, but consider the response to an earlier RSA publication on spirituality from the Guardian's Religious editor Andrew Brown: "I think your argument is important, and manages to a surprising extent to remove spirituality from religion without turning it into another marketing category - surely the subversion of spirituality into a marketing strategy for new age tat is one of the most depressing features of our world?" [45]

The point is that it's not so much that a marketised spirituality has hijacked religion, but that, while religion was looking the other way, capitalism hijacked spirituality. The term has therefore been somewhat contaminated, but not fatally so, which is why it needs to be reimagined as part of a constructive critique of capitalism, which is what we tried to do throughout the project, as indicated in part four of this book. Indeed, Professor Oliver Davies argues "As a dynamic form of shared language use, it carves out an enabling space of non-materialistic and anti-materialistic community."

A third challenge is that 'spiritual' is too oblique and nebulous, and insufficiently exacting to be valid as a universal currency for constructive conversation. For instance, Sociologist Keiran Flanagan writes "The trouble with spirituality is that its opacity admits

too much but precludes too little"[46] and Buddhist scholar David Loy writes: "That word [spiritual] is not respectable in some circles and too respectable in some others."[47]

But that unevenness of meaning across the population is precisely what you would expect given that our understanding of spirituality is directly related to the manner and intensity in which one engages with it. If you don't like 'spiritual', that might be as much to do with you as with the term, particularly with regard to comfort with uncertainty, because the value of the term is that it gives permission to speak of things that are unknowable.

In this respect, Peter Sheldrake argues that spirituality does not merely offer an enabling space but also a reference point for the broadest possible context: "Rather than being simply one element among others in human existence, 'the spiritual' is best understood as the integrating factor – life as a whole."[48]

The fourth problem that some actively dislike the vagueness of the word and the tendentious uses of it that can result from vagueness. In response to an earlier RSA blog post about spirituality, one commentor wrote: "I'm starting to really loathe this word "spiritual". It is the archetypal Humpty Dumpty word: it means exactly what the writer wants it to mean, neither more nor less."[49]

This issue is mostly a matter of intellectual style, but there is no need to be so uncharitable and unimaginative with respect to vagueness. As Flanagan argues: "As a phenomenon, spirituality is something subjective, experiential, non-rational, unverifiable and serendipitous in its eruptions."[50] These are all qualities that cannot be readily structured and lend themselves better to the quality of negative capability: "When a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason."[51]

As an instructive example of the cultural need for negative capability in practice, Chris Harding highlights Japan after Fukushima, in a cultural context which lacked psychiatry and religion as we understand them. The response to the disaster, how to make sense of it, needed a higher order framing, both in terms of who to speak to and how to create meaning out of those discussions. In this respect, Harding argues that in Japan there is a general scepticism towards concepts and "grounded ideas that are too instrumental", but the term spirituality is appreciated because it is open and capacious, rather than criticised for being vague.

More generally, in situations that are otherwise politically or culturally sensitive, the inclusive ambiguity of spirituality is a positive advantage. In our workshops it was noted that in mental health and educational contexts the term is useful because it allows people to speak about fundamental matters without the challenges relating to particular religious positions. However, as a counter point, Elizabeth Oldfield was keen to highlight

that Religion should not be seen as inherently divisive, but could also be seen and experienced as 'a secure base from which to explore, not a fence beyond which lie infidels.'

The deeper point is that 'spiritual' points the judicious value of vagueness for our understanding of ourselves more broadly:

"There is huge value in vagueness…there is something important about staying in the vague for as long as it takes. There are obviously dangers of vagueness but I think that spirituality may not be as dangerous a topic when it is regarded in a vague way as some others because, after all, spirituality has always been something that deconstructs our lives. Long before Postmodernism was invented, the spirit was deconstructing daily reality in culture. Hence it is not a problem for me that I am vague about what I mean, or what anyone means by spirituality."[52]

A fifth problem is that some argue that the concept is somehow too ambitious and aspirational and therefore needlessly contentious. For instance a major proponent of mindfulness meditation in the West, John Kabat Zinn, has been quite careful not to present mindfulness as 'spiritual', which he believes creates needless confusion: "My working definition of spiritual is what it means for us to be truly human. And I leave it at that. I mean, who knows?"[53]

Well quite, but some do claim to know, or at least want to pose that fundamental question, and much of the value of 'spiritual' is precisely that it allows us to talk about what it means to be fully human, and therefore say things that may otherwise be difficult to say. The invitation to explore what it means to be fully human is arguably the whole point of the term as indicated by Sheldrake: "Spirituality is a word that, in broad terms, stands for lifestyles and practices that embody a vision of human existence and of how the human spirit is to achieve its full potential. In that sense, 'spirituality' embraces an aspiration approach, whether religious or secular, to the meaning and conduct of human life."[54]

While deeper aspiration is central to the spiritual, the corollary is that 'spiritual' should not be used as a casual honorific or status claim to close down difficult questions. If you think some aspect of your behaviour is 'spiritual', that doesn't automatically set it apart from other activities and you can't just help yourself to the term (spiritual) to justify whatever you like. The spirit of the spiritual should be an invitation to inquiry, not a defensive or evasive manoeuvre.

From considering these five objections to the use of the term – religious baggage, crypto capitalism, unevenness of understanding and appreciation, vagueness, and unhelpful status claim - it becomes clear that not in spite of these objections but because of them, there is a strong case for using 'spiritual' and 'spirituality'.

Religious 'baggage' points to the challenge of accessing institutional wisdom without the risk of being subsumed by it. By directly challenging materialism in all its guises, spirituality is as much about challenging capitalism as propping it up. Varying appreciation for the spiritual signifies the cultural challenge to talk about what really matters to us. The vagueness of the term is socially and culturally valuable, giving permission for conversations on fundamental matters. And yes, the spiritual is grounded in conceptions of what it means to be fully human and the ongoing challenge of making sense of what that means.

If the goal is to shape reality as much as to reflect it, it makes no sense to strictly define 'spiritual' because these functions served by the term are mostly weakened by definition. In our final public event, Marina Benjamin made a related point very clearly – that whatever we deem 'the spiritual' to be, it will change as society changes.

With this in mind, I feel we can give definition without giving a definition, and I am grateful to psychiatrist Andrew Powell for highlighting that the spiritual is a signpost, not a sign, which led me to the following encapsulation: "The capacious term 'spirituality' lacks clarity because it is not so much a unitary concept as a signpost for a range of touchstones; our search for meaning, our sense of the sacred, the value of compassion, the experience of transcendence, the hunger for transformation."[55] In all of these dimensions, there is scope for flex and change, and spirituality remains a moving feast.

Why 'Spiritual but not religious' might be a wrong turn

In the first RSA spirituality workshop, Oliver Robinson gave a remarkably succinct overview of where the idea of 'Spiritual but not religious' came from, based on "a 400 year long wave of ideas" traversing Religious pluralism, Romanticism, Quakerism, Mysticism, The American Transcendental tradition, Evolving interpretations of Science, Counter-cultural movements and the modern tendency of people to identify with the label 'spiritual but not religious' (around a quarter of the populations of Europe and the USA). He ends a chapter from a forthcoming book on which his talk is based as follows:

"Science and spirituality are streams of culture with a common source in the progressive, rebellious ethos of modernity. They are both premised on the values of exploration, questioning, continued innovation, and of never-ending search. For this reason they are both sceptical of religion as a vehicle for truth, and doubtful of holy books from the past as sources of wisdom. From this common starting point they then head off in contrasting directions, while maintaining meaningful points of connection. While science has been the rational head of modernity that has explored the world rigorously and schematically, spirituality has been its pulsating, emotional heart, exploring the mystical, transcendental, intuitive and ineffable."[56]

While the terms 'spirituality' and 'religion' were previously undifferentiated, modern conceptions tend to see them as either polar opposites, or as one (spirituality) being a core function of the other (religion). The observed shift has paralleled an increased public and academic interest in spirituality. The number of citations in the psychological research literature with the word "religion" in the title doubled between 1970 and 2005, while the number of citations with the word "spirituality" in the title experienced a 40-fold increase over the same time period.[57] While we shouldn't ask for too much from a single study, research by Nancy Ammerman in the US indicated that those who self-define as 'spiritual but not religious' are often neither spiritual nor religious in practice because they approach the spiritual outside of an enduring social context.[58]

In this context of proliferating research on spirituality, Zinnbauer & Pargament presented the following emerging polarities between the modern usages of the terms[59]: Substantive religion vs. functional spirituality; Static religion vs. dynamic spirituality; Institutional objective religion vs. personal subjective spirituality; Belief-based religion vs. emotional/experiential-based spirituality; Negative religion vs. positive spirituality.

These juxtapositions are useful because they corroborate the felt sense that 'spirituality' is somehow fresh and desirable, with religion moribund and unfashionable, but on closer inspection this seems a shallow analysis. Indeed, Elizabeth Oldfield remarked in our first workshop that there is a danger of spirituality and religion defining one another mutually, such that the more that 'spirituality' starts to look open, inquiring and inclusive the more religion starts to be increasingly dismissed as narrow, sectarian, reactionary, patriarchal; although in recent years prominent thinkers like Terry Eagleton and John Gray have resisted this tendency.[60]

While there has been a growing normalisation of the idea that a person can be 'spiritual but not religious', this designation may actually compound the problem of intellectual embarrassment surrounding the spiritual. What it typically means is, 'I don't wish to identify with an ancient and compromised institution'; or maybe 'I don't want to have any rules set for me by joining in with an institution', i.e. the rationale shares features in common with not wanting to join political parties or other forms of associations where the binding quality lies in a shared commitment to something.

Whatever the theoretical construct underpinning 'spiritual', people self-describing in this category get attacked from both sides; from atheists for their perceived irrationality and wishful thinking, and from organised religion for their rootless self-indulgence and lack of commitment; and meanwhile we overlook the myriad shades of identification and longing within and outside this category, to our loss.

We struggle to speak of the spiritual with coherence mostly because it has been subsumed by historical and cultural contingency, and is now smothered in an uncomfortable space between religion and the rejection of religion, but nonetheless it seems

foolish to think of religion as the dispensable 'bathwater' holding the precious 'spiritual baby'. A fuller view highlights the human need for institutional support and guidance, shared myths, rituals and practices, historical perspectives and cultural influence – these are not unimportant things.

It seems fair to argue that religions are the particular cultural, doctrinal and institutional expressions of human spiritual needs, which are universal. Doing so gives us cause to rethink our idea of 'belief' and what it means to be religious rather than reject religion wholesale. In this respect, is it not the sign of a spiritually degenerate society that many feel obliged to define their fundamental outlook on the world in such relativist and defensive terms as 'spiritual but not religious'? Compare the designations: 'educated, but not due to schooling' or 'healthy, but not because of medicine'.

A strong counter-argument is that if the complex relationship with religion is part of the reason 'spirituality' struggles to be clearly defined, and also why some are wary of spirituality more generally, there is a case for trying to pin down spirituality analytically and differentiating it from religion clearly and comprehensively. Many have attempted to build such juxtapositions with religion, suggesting that spirituality is part of a broader 'subjective turn' in the social sciences, in which individualism becomes the norm, and engagement with spiritual matters is de-institutionalised, stripped of doctrine, ritual and communal practice.[61]

Author Sam Harris attempts to do this in his recent impressive account of spirituality for atheists, but his focus is almost exclusively on individual spiritual experience and mindfulness-based-practices as a path towards them. While the expansion of consciousness and self-transcendence are key aspects of spirituality, they are only part of the picture.[62]

Philosopher David Rousseau's framework of modern-day spirituality is a more thorough and comprehensive attempt[63]. He frames spirituality as a highly complex phenomenon made up of thirteen individual parts and suggests that confusion arises because people tend to refer to each of these highly different parts with the same name: "spirituality," without acknowledging the distinctions between the parts, including spiritual experiences, spiritual behaviour, and spiritual growth. Doing so illuminates a key difference between spirituality and religion, namely that specific doctrines are constitutive of religion but are not constitutive of spirituality, but that begs many questions about how exactly doctrine functions within religion, and whether we can really live without proxy doctrines in secular form.

Good theories can be highly practical, and Rousseau's map of spirituality is one of the best such maps available, but in the case of spirituality there seems to be a fundamental problem with this kind of approach. No matter how well a theory of spirituality coheres theoretically nobody can definitively control what spirituality is, or should be.

Words and concepts live, breathe and change as they come into contact with the world and all the more so with spirituality which is a fundamentally reflexive notion. We need an evolving first-person experience or engagement with the spiritual for a personal understanding to emerge, which may again change as one comes into contact with alternative views and practices in other people.[64]

Spiritual is more about meaning than 'happiness'

"For a civilization so fixated on achieving happiness, we seem to be remarkably incompetent at the task." – Oliver Burkeman[65]

Perhaps the main substantive learning point from the RSA Student Design Award Competition on spirituality, in 2012 was that despite a detailed brief on what spiritual might mean, in their design products and rationales the students aged 20-26 did not seem to differentiate between spirituality and wellbeing. It is not clear whether this was a failure of the brief, or a broader lack of awareness about what the spiritual might refer to other than feeling good.

This conflation contrasts sharply with the (older) participants of the workshops and speakers at the public events, most of whom were very keen to emphasise that the role of spiritual perspectives, practices and experiences is not, as such, to make people happy. Indeed, in our workshops we had many examples to illustrate this point.

Professor Oliver Davies described the commitment and sacrifice of taking two years off his work to support his adopted son who was going off the rails as the most spiritual period of his life. He said it was much more intensely spiritual than other experiences relating to 'bliss', or thrill seeking at other stages of life.

Such commitments can be deeply meaningful and therefore rewarding, but they are not about being 'happy'. This point chimes with research by Baumeister and his team of researchers who asked 400 Americans between the ages of 18 and 78 whether they felt that their lives were meaningful and/or happy; there was a big difference between the two. "Clearly happiness is not all that people seek," the study reads, "and indeed the meaningful but unhappy life is in some ways more admirable than the happy but meaningless one." Baumeister suggested this might be because happiness is often about being a "taker" while meaningfulness in life corresponds with being a "giver."[66]

Jules Evans complemented this perspective on meaning with his own vivid account of his social anxiety crisis, but argued that as his research work in this area progresses he is drawn less to the importance of discrete experiences and more to the longer-term changes in how we see and relate to the world, of which those experiences are a part: "Thinkers like Thomas Keating suggest that there really is no substitute for crisis and hu-

miliation in fuelling our capacity for discernment and practice – he says that he has got to the point where he prays for humiliation as a form of grace."[67]

Madeleine Bunting refers to the 'aspiration error' that arises from the danger of conflating or confusing the aims of spirituality with those of psychological wellbeing. While we may rightly wish to be happy, the spiritual helps to make sense of why pursuing happiness directly is often self-defeating: it is often fundamentally ungrounded in reality. While happiness is fine as far it goes, and it is true that you are likely to feel better, for instance, by following nef's five a day for your mind', human suffering has deep roots in our inherent vulnerability to life's contingent circumstances that we arguably don't face up to as much as we perhaps should.

In a personal communication by email, Mark Vernon deepened this point as follows: "Spiritual commitments in a theological setting are ultimately about a commitment to what might be called Being Itself. The religiously-inclined probably have a sense of the contingency of life, the universe and everything that implies the need for an underpinning of existence - that which is not contingency but necessary, namely God. That is all rather scholastically expressed: perhaps the more human way of putting it is that spiritual commitments offer a way to find consolation and meaning in a world of impermanence and suffering."

Professor Chris Cook has researched the role of the spiritual in various forms of recovery. In his clinical experience of people raped or abused, he finds that they are often healed most effectively by particular forms of human encounter: "moments of disclosure of this kind of trauma were in some indefinable way "spiritual" – that is, although not explicitly labelled spiritual/religious – they nonetheless have a "spiritual" quality about them." Relatedly, Professor Margaret Holloway refers to "wounded healers" in the context of social work – that those who had been through suffering were often the most effective at allaying suffering in others. In this respect, the sense of the experience of meaning arises from "knowing you are needed":

"Very simply, it is out of shared weakness and vulnerability that the healer reaches out to heal. The model teaches us to value rather than avoid our own pain, perhaps from a similar personal experience, as the key element which enables the healer to connect and communicate with the dying or bereaved person"[68]

While the idea that the spiritual is not so much a path to greater happiness but a way to find meaning in and through suffering sounds Buddhist, there is also a related Christian perspective. In his outstandingly written book, 'Unapologetic' Francis Spufford argues that the best modern interpretation of the word 'sin' is 'the human propensity to f**k things up', by which he means not merely that things go wrong, but that we actively destroy things that are of value in our lives. He argues that this 'HPtFtU' is fundamental to the human condition, and that acknowledging it does not lead to gloom, but on the

contrary to a kind of liberation:

"I've found that admitting there is some black in the colour chart of my psyche doesn't invite the block of dark ink to swell, or give a partial truth more power over me than it should have, but the opposite. Admitting there's some black in the mixture makes it matter less. It makes it easier to pay attention to the mixedness of the rest. It helps you stop wasting your time on denial, and therefore helps you stop ricocheting between unrealistic self-praise and unrealistic self-blame. It helps you to be kind to yourself."[69]

Mindfulness teacher and author Dr Danny Penman suggests that this kind of self-acceptance is a pre-condition of growth, which is also a fundamental aspect of humanistic psychology, captured in the classic saying of Carl Rogers: "The curious paradox is that when I accept myself just as I am, then I can change."[70]

The heart of the spiritual- it's about our 'ground' not our 'place'

"A talent for speaking differently, rather than arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change." - Richard Rorty[71]

As argued above, spirituality means many different things to many different people, but to illustrate some of its common ground, it is helpful to consider it through the issue that is apparently the most divisive – beliefs - on which there are broadly three spiritual perspectives.[72]

First, in religious spirituality, religions are the cultural and institutional expression of the spiritual. Second, although it is a problematic category, as argued above, the 'spiritual but not religious' perspective captures the large and heterogeneous group that does not have settled shared beliefs, nor culturally recognised institutional forms.

Third, and significantly for homing in on the most aspects of the spiritual, there is an emerging 'secular spirituality' which is typically atheistic or humanistic but does not disavow the idea that some forms of experience, ritual or practice may be deeper or more meaningful than others; a perspective that still finds value in the term 'spiritual' as a way to encapsulate that understanding. Consider, for instance, humanist celebrants giving dignity to marriages and funerals, or the completely open nature of the 'higher power' that participants in Alcoholics Anonymous are asked to place their faith in[73], or ecstatic dancing, sublime art, the charms of nature, the birth of a child, or even the sexual union that led to it. For all the problems with the word spiritual, there are forms of life where we seem to need it to point towards an appreciation that would otherwise be ineffable.

Do these three perspectives on spirituality share touchstones of any kind? It seems to me that they do, but clearly it's not God, or particular places or stories, practices, or even ethics. What they seem to share, whether the issue in question is the sacred, or transcendence or meaning, is the importance of our 'ground', rather than our 'place'. This distinction stems from Buddhism, but it can also be inferred in existential and phenomenological thought, particularly Tillich's notion that God is Being-itself and therefore our ultimate, not merely partial or proximate concern i.e the concern upon which all our other concerns converge. And the distinction is evident in Heidegger's emphasis on being as such, rather than beings; of the philosophical primacy of the lived experience of being human, or as he puts it, "being-there".[74]

By our ground I mean the most basic facts of our existence: that we are here at all, that we exist in and through this body that somehow breathes, that we build selves through and for others, that we're a highly improbable part of an unfathomable whole, and of course, that we will inevitably die. Another way to characterise the relevance of our ground comes from the psychotherapist Mark Epstein who refers to the spiritual as 'anything that takes us beyond the personality.'

As anybody who has faced a life-threatening illness will know, reflecting on our ground heightens the importance of not postponing our lives, of using the time we have for what really matters to us. And yet, research on the main regrets of the dying indicates the sad fact that we rarely actually do this – most of us do in fact postpone our lives.

And why? Because the world perpetuates our attachment to our place, by which I mean our constructed identities, our fragile reputations, our insatiable desires. We get lost in our identification with our place, and all the cultural signifiers of status that come with it: our dwellings, our salaries, our clothes, our Twitter followers. As T.S. Eliot put it: "We are distracted from distraction by distraction, filled with fancies and empty of meaning."[75]

And this shouldn't surprise us. In 21st century Britain the average urban adult is exposed to around 300 adverts a day, and we find ourselves caught up with what economist Tim Jackson calls 'the social logic of consumption'.[76] There is no simple causality in such matters, but while our attachment to our place fuels consumption, our experience of our ground may provide immunity to the idea that we need to consume to validate ourselves.

Our failure to come back to the basic conditions of our existence may also be closely connected to the gradual and relentless shift in the public being described as consumers rather than citizens, a shift meticulously documented by the Public Interest Research Centre in national broadsheet references.[77] Consumption predates capitalism, and is part of being human, but consumerism is less benign, a vision of human

life that takes us away from our existential ground and threatens our ecological ground in the process.

The Buddha put it like this:

"People love their place: they delight and revel in their place. It is hard for people who love, delight and revel in their place to see this ground: this-conditionality, conditioned arising."

Secular Buddhist writer Stephen Batchelor comments as follows:

"People are blinded to the fundamental contingency of their existence by attachment to their place. One's place is that to which one is most strongly bound. It is the foundation on which the entire edifice of one's identity is built. It is formed through identification with a physical location and social position, by one's religious and political beliefs, through that instinctive conviction of being a solitary ego. One's place is where one stands, and whence one takes a stand against everything that seems to challenge what is "mine". This stance is your posture vis-à-vis the world: it encompasses everything that lies on the side of the line that separates "you" from "me". Delight in it creates a sense of being fixed and secure in the midst of an existence that is anything but fixed and secure. Loss of it, one fears, would mean that everything one cherishes would be overwhelmed by chaos, meaningless, or madness…" [78]

Much of modern life perpetuates this sense that your place is all you have, and not just in a consumerist way. For example respected Sociologist Anthony Giddens refers to the need for 'ontological security' in terms of having a job and a place to live[79], but from a spiritual perspective that is still 'place', not ground. What is radical about spiritual teaching is its insistence to look deeper at the conditions not of existence as such. Batchelor explains as follows:

"Gotama's quest led him to abandon everything to do with his place- his king, his homeland, his social standing, his position in the family, his beliefs, his conviction of being a self in charge of a body and mind- but it did not result in psychotic collapse. For in relinquishing his place (alaya), he arrived at a ground (tthana). But this ground is quite unlike the seemingly solid ground of place. It is the contingent, transient, ambiguous, unpredictable, fascinating, and terrifying ground called 'life'. Life is groundless ground: no sooner does it appear, than it disappears, only to renew itself, then immediately break up and vanquish again."

Taking the spiritual seriously in this way means "an existential readjustment, a seismic shift in the core of oneself and one's relation to others and the world." This is not spirituality as comfort, the 'candles in the bath' we joked about in our first public event, but rather a completely different way of living:

"The groundless ground is not the absence of support. It supports you in a different way. Whereas a place can tie you down and close you off, this ground lets you go and opens you up. It does not stand still for a moment. To be supported by it, you have to be with it in a different way. Instead of standing firmly on your feet and holding tight with both hands in order to feel secure in your place, here you have to dart across its liquid, shimmering surface like a long-legged fly, swim with its current like a fast-moving fish. Gotama compared the experience to 'entering a stream'."[80]

The take-home message from the ground/place distinction is not to give up material life, but to understand more deeply what the spiritual/material juxtaposition is really about and why what emerges is radically inclusive. Much of our lives are about patterns of identity formation and social reputation in the material world, but there is also a neglected aspect about the contingency of being here at all that the spiritual speaks to, regardless of religious belief.

In Batchelor's account of Buddhism this contingency is expressed in a particular way, above, but similar ideas are implicit in most world religions, in many who identify as 'spiritual but not religious' and in the nascent forms of atheistic spirituality. In each case the spiritual injunction is to look at, know, and feel your existential 'ground' – to know what it is not to be a particular person at a particular place in time, but to be human as such.

It would be unfortunate, however, if people were to feel that all that spirituality is, is captured by this ground/place distinction. As with Andrew Powell's distinction between signpost and sign above, the reference to your 'ground' is, to use an old Zen distinction 'the finger pointing to the moon', not 'the moon' as such. Knowing the spiritual is about 'being here' is important, but exploring our ground opens up the diverse aspects of the spiritual; the beliefs, the sacred, the awakening, the experiences, the perspectives and the practices, all of which can be inferred and appreciated from a deeper and fuller understanding of human nature, which we turn to now.

Part Two

In search of our spiritual 'ground' - what are we?

"…The prevalent sensation of oneself as a separate ego enclosed in
a bag of skin is a hallucination which accords neither with Western
science nor with the experimental philosophy-religions of the East…"
-Alan Watts[81]

This second part of this book is about the connection between our understanding of human nature, and our appreciation of the spiritual. From a literature review there appear to be six main relationships that I felt were worth unpacking in some depth; between the social brain and the nature of belief, cultural cognition and the sacred, automatic behaviour and the need to 'wake up', embodied cognition and the experience of meaning, hemispheric lateralisation and the need for balance, and neuroplasticity and the role of spiritual practice. The emerging scientific vision of what we are and how we behave arises from a range of disciplines and should not be seen as axioms for the validity of the spiritual, but more like supporting context for the idea that the spiritual is fundamental to human experience, rather than deviant, niche or outdated.

The emerging early 21st century view of our 'ground' indicates we are fundamentally embodied, constituted by evolutionary biology, embedded in complex online and offline networks, largely habitual creatures, highly sensitive to social and cultural norms, riddled with cognitive quirks and biases, and much more rationalising than rational.

Such a shift in perspective is important because every culturally sanctioned form of knowledge contains an implicit injunction. The injunction of science is to do the experiment and analyse the data. The injunction of history is to critically engage with primary and secondary sources of evidence. The injunction of philosophy is to question assumptions, make distinctions and be logical. If spirituality is to be recognised as something with ontological weight and social standing, it also needs an injunction that is culturally recognised, as it was for centuries in the Christian west and still is in many

societies worldwide.

The spiritual injunction is principally an experiential one, namely to know what we are as fully as possible. Such self-knowledge is a deeply reflexive matter. The point is not to casually introspect, but rather to strive to connect our advanced third-person understanding of human nature with a growing skill in observing how one's first-person nature manifests in practice, and to test the validity and relevance of this experience and understanding in second-person contexts. In this sense, spirituality is about I, we and it, and this process of trying to know oneself more fully, both in understanding and experience, is therefore no mere prelude to meaningful social change, but the thing itself.

The point of reconsidering spirituality through such lenses is not to explain away spiritual content. We do not want to collapse our deliciously difficult existential and ethical issues into psychological and sociological concepts. The point is rather to explore the provenance of those questions and experiences with fresh intellectual resources.

The Social Brain: why 'beliefs' are not what we typically assume

"I'm not only agnostic about the answer, I'm agnostic about the question."
-Jonathan Safran Foer responding to: 'what do you believe?' on Radio 4.[82]

Immanuel Kant said that the impact of liberal enlightenment on our spiritual life was such that if somebody were to walk in on you while you were on your knees praying, you would be profoundly embarrassed. As indicated above, that imagined experience of embarrassment is still widely felt, and this unease with the spiritual has partly arisen out of secularised Christian epistemological and moral frameworks which were taken up with the enlightenment, particularly the dichotomies between mind and body; reason and desire; and culture and nature; all of which were value-laden and implicated in the political projects of the enlightenment.[83]

Those divisions are relevant to what Andrew Marr suggests may be the position of many if not most people in modern European societies who live in "a tepid confusing middle ground between strong belief and strong disbelief".[84] We may experience something resembling 'belief' in our bodies, without being able to make sense of it rationally in our minds, or articulate it clearly in public discourse, and we lack any external reference point to arbitrate on any resulting confusion.

One major challenge in making the spiritual more tangible and tractable is, therefore, to enrich our currently impoverished idea of what it means to believe. To believe something is often assumed to mean endorsing a statement of fact about how things are, but that is both outdated and unhelpful. Consider the story of two rabbis debating the existence of God through a long night and jointly reaching the conclusion that he

or she did not exist. The next morning, one observed the other deep in prayer and took him to task. "What are you doing? Last night we established that God does not exist." To which the other rabbi replied, "What's that got to do with it?"[85]

The praying non-believer illustrates that belief may be much closer to what the sociologist of religion William Morgan described as "a shared imaginary, a communal set of practices that structure life in powerfully aesthetic terms". Within the same discipline Gordon Lynch suggests this point needs deepening: "The unquestioned status of propositional models of belief within the sociology of religion arguably reflects a lack of theoretical discussion… about the nature of the person as a social agent."[86]

In this respect, it is notable that David Hay, in his report on the state of spirituality in adults in Britain in 2002, described the key feature of spiritual understanding as 'relational consciousness', of which we says this:

"'Relational consciousness' caught us by surprise, because we had some notion of spirituality as a solitary affair, something very private…In our research we always ask people to tell us in what way their spiritual experience has affected their lives. By far the commonest of all answers is that they say they want to behave better. One way of putting this is to say that the 'psychological distance' between themselves and other people, the environment and (if

they are religious believers) God, becomes much shorter. If someone else, or the environment, is harmed they feel that they too are damaged in some way." [87]

To put the point bluntly, the idea of the individual is not as true to human experience as the idea of individual in relation. This idea of fundamental intersubjectivity goes back to Hegel, but was expressed also by John Macurray, a Scots Philosopher who Tony Blair cited as a major intellectual influence: "The unit of personal existence is not the individual, but two persons in personal relation…we are persons not by individual right, but in virtue of our relation to one another…..The unit of the personal is not the 'I' but the 'You and I'."[88]

In The RSA's Social Brain Centre's November 2011 Publication Transforming Behaviour Change, this issue is examined in detail (p10-13) with a full range of references; the case for 'the nature of a person as a social agent' stems from research in a broad range of disciplines in social and natural sciences, and is summarised in that report as follows:

"…From archaeology and anthropology we learn that the relatively large human brain size is a function of the complexity of our social networks, and the role of alloparenting in fostering trust. From Social Neuroscience, we learn that our nervous systems do not end at our skins but are in constant communication and interchange with other

nervous systems. From molecular Neuroscience, we learn that humans have a relatively large number of spindle neurons that appear to be important in rapidly resolving social ambiguity. From studies with monkeys we learn of mirror neurons as the neural basis of imitation and empathy, and infer their existence in humans based on corroborating evidence from social psychology. From neuropsychology we learn that consciousness appears to be purpose-built not for motor control, but for facilitating social interaction by simulating events, processing sentences and sequences, and thereby facilitating social interaction. This knowledge, taken together, contextualises what it means to say that our brains are functionally social."

As a neat way to encapsulate that body of research, one of the world's leading Social Neuroscientists John Cacioppo uses the following metaphor:

"The telereceptors of the human brain have provided wireless broadband inter-connectivity to humans for millennia. Just as computers have capacities and processes that are transduced through but extend beyond the hardware of a single computer, the human brain has evolved to promote social and cultural capacities and processes that extend far beyond a solitary brain. To understand the full capacity of humans, one needs to appreciate not only the memory and computational power of the brain but its capacity for representing, understanding, and connecting with other individuals. That is, one needs to recognise that we have evolved a powerful, meaning-making social brain."[89]

In the context of such evidence for the inherently social nature of cognition, along-side relatively ill-tempered debates between new atheists and religious 'believers', it is clearly timely to challenge the folk psychology which leads to such debates apparently offering more heat than light. Belief about the ultimate nature, meaning and purpose of the world is clearly not about an autonomous individual striving to consciously construct their own guide to how they should act in the world. However, such a simplistic view is to spiritual matters what homo-economicus is to public policy; although we know it can't quite be right, but struggle to shake it off.

We continue to talk of belief as if it were a mental representation of the outcome of a deliberation about the nature of reality. But that's not what beliefs feel like, nor is it how they emerge. Belief formation is only partly as an individual making inferences and judgments on the basis of reason. The larger, but currently neglected part of belief formation relates to identity, belonging and shared rituals and practices that we are barely conscious of. As Madeleine Bunting put it in the first public event, we cannot get 'beyond belief' in that richer sense. Belief is not so much the distilled outcome of deliberations to which we consciously assent from an unproblematic vantage point; it is more like the living questioning of the vantage point itself.[90]

A rationalist humanist response to this contention might be to acknowledge that

reason emerges through such social influences, but defend the primacy of reason as something that can be refined and developed, allowing it to cut through or transcend them. The idea of individual belief formation is not necessarily naïve, but rather, aspirational. Perhaps sustained inquiry can create levels of individual autonomy that go beyond the social rather than merely ignoring it.

In this respect, Anthropologist and Humanist Matthew Engelke remarked in the first RSA workshop that Humanists are often self-consciously contrarian. They are animated by ethical concerns but part of their love of reason is that many don't want to be 'like-minded' and often want to disagree. He referred to "the militant subject", a concept premised on the idea that commitment to a cause can sometimes eclipse commitments to one's community. In this sense, a humanist may still want to challenge beliefs as things that, in principle, are amenable to rational inquiry, or as Engelke put it: "The Humanist focus tends to be on realisation rather than conversion i.e. 'You are always a humanist. You just don't know it.'"

Philosopher John Gray might counter that the faith in reason underpinning this idea of realization is not so different from religious faith, indeed, it might be more far-fetched: "Religious faith is based on accepting that we know very little of God. But we know a great deal about human beings, and one of the things we know for sure is that we're not rational animals. Believing in the power of human reason requires a greater leap of faith than believing in God."[91]

Nonetheless, a deep recognition of the myriad of social influences on both belief and reason should at least encourage a deeper public discussion on whether our existing terms 'believer', 'non-believer'; or atheist, agnostic, theist are serving us well. In a recent email exchange with Theos advisor Ian Christie, he illustrates the importance of this point. Many who might like to go to church feel that they can't because they have a skewed perception of belief:

"One problem the churches have is the perception among many people that you can join only once you believe; in reality, it is joining and being in congregation that leads to belief. And many people also feel that 'belief' requires a) certainty and b) accepting 6 impossible things before breakfast. But belief is about trust and hope, not certainty; and the impossible things are not equivalent to scientific hypotheses or even statements about the facts of the world - they are metaphors intended to give us a faint hope of grasping some aspect of what we cannot (in our present form) ever fully understand or articulate."[92]

Viewing 'belief' as an emergent property of social interaction and institutions doesn't mean we should all become religious, but it does open the possibility of religious institutions reforming in ways where 'belief' is less of a barrier to entry, and more like an optional emergent property of participation. Dave Tomlinson's approach, outlined

in How to be a Bad Christian is an example of this inclusive approach.[93] It will also be interesting to observe the evolution of 'The Sunday Assembly' movement, which purports to be free of 'beliefs', because if the foregoing argument is right, 'beliefs' will soon start to emerge in the process of building and managing a global movement.

Cultural Psychology: Why the sacred won't go away

"The persistence of the sacred is not a symptom of a persistent cultural backwardness that rational Enlightenment can cure, but an inherent structure of morally boundaried societies." – Gordon Lynch[94]

"The human mind is a story processor, not a logic processor." - Jonathan Haidt[95]

'Social' and 'cultural' are so closely related that that they are often conflated. This conflation is understandable and not always problematic, but it can be useful to distinguish them in the context of the spiritual, because they engender different aspects of the human 'ground'.

The 'social' refers principally to relationships; we evolve through physiological inter-dependence and the psychological need to attach and reciprocate support. Culture is about the ideas that emerge to make sense of that fundamentally social existence. The 'society' that emerges from the social is not a given, but constantly created and recreated through expressive tools that humans have become well adapted to, including language, music and art, and all the stories they seek to tell.

Such narratives are rarely transparent or propositional, and need to be interpreted and debated hermeneutically, as they have been for centuries. If our social need is principally to relate, our principal cultural need is to make meaning, and those two needs are often mutually reinforcing. You could say the cultural is what turns the social into 'society'.

This socio-cultural perspective highlights why a society dominated by the logical and propositional does not fit human culture particularly well. As Labouvie-Vief has argued, we are in danger of overvaluing 'logos' "in which meaning is disembedded from reality of flux and change and related to stable systems of categorization…"[96]. And we risk undervaluing 'mythos' in which "the object of thought is not articulated separately from the motivational and organismic states of the thinker; rather the thinker's whole organism partakes in the articulation of the object and animates it with its own motives and intentions".[97]

Our need for mythos is closely related to the social function of the sacred, because it highlights the need for shared cultural touchstones that are not reducible to logos. As

a leading scholar in this domain, Gordon Lynch puts it, the sacred "is a way of communicating about what people take to be absolute realities that exert a profound moral claim over their lives." He adds that notions like protection of children, truth telling and the integrity of nations are key modern manifestations of the sacred.[98]

If the message from research relating to the Social Brain is that beliefs are not principally propositional, and that public debates about belief therefore often miss the point, the message from cultural psychology and cultural sociology is this: The sacred is not an old fashioned sociological construct or a thinning religious ambience in a vanishing corner of the public realm, but rather a fundamental part of how humans make meaning and form bonds, and the unacknowledged undercurrent in most political debates.

Cultural Psychologist Jonathan Haidt puts it like this:

"The key to understanding tribal behavior is not money, it's sacredness. The great trick that humans developed at some point in the last few hundred thousand years is the ability to circle around a tree, rock, ancestor, flag, book or god, and then treat that thing as sacred. People who worship the same idol can trust one another, work as a team and prevail over less cohesive groups. So if you want to understand politics, and especially our divisive culture wars, you must follow the sacredness...A good way to follow the sacredness is to listen to the stories that each tribe tells about itself and the larger nation. "[99]

Where Haidt says 'tree, rock, ancestor, flag, book or god' we might add that conceptual ideas also have sacred content, for instance ideas like 'the heroic individual', 'the independent nation', 'the free market', 'Europe' and 'Immigration' all contain sacred content. Alas, most political debates fail to acknowledge these moral foundations, which is why they are often unsatisfying for the public to endure. Still, it is worth highlighting that while our allegedly secular culture prizes logos it remains awash in mythos in service of the sacred. We struggle to acknowledge this point, because it highlights the limited role of reason in, for instance, rational voter deliberation over policy in elections. It is too strong to say that democracy is premised on a lie, but it is no secret that political campaigners understand that elections are not won on issues, but rather on the capacity to tap into moral foundations relating to the sacred, by framing narratives with a judicious use of root metaphors.[100]

In a deeper analysis of this point in The Sacred in the Modern World, Sociologist Gordon Lynch argues that the sacred does not apply to a discrete universal entity (e.g. a deity), but rather to social and cultural constructions that have come to be made sacred.[101] In this sense, the sacred is closely associated to our sense of moral reality, and is thus present in religious and secular contexts alike.

A striking contemporary example is technology which exemplifies a complex sym-

bol of the sacred in modern life because it inspires dichotomous fantasies of both the salvation and the extinction of humanity[102]. Lynch argues that identifying with sacred forms can have both positive and negative consequences, the latter of which could be mitigated by engaging in "moral reflexivity," or rather, critical reflection on a sacred form. Uncovering the modern landscape of the sacred is therefore important because sacred forms and symbols give rise to "powerful tides of moral emotion around our individual and collective lives" and we need the language of the sacred to make sense of it. [103]

The social constitution of belief and the cultural function of the sacred both highlight the degree to which human cognition is unconscious, but neither speaks directly to the fact that it is also automatic and habitual to an unnerving extent.

Automatic processing: Why the spiritual injunction to 'wake up' matters

"Oh, I've had my moments, and if I had to do it over again, I'd have more of them. In fact, I'd try to have nothing else. Just moments, one after the other, instead of living so many years ahead of each day." - Nadine Stair, 85 years old [104]

After a range of recent popular books on the phenomenon, it is no longer controversial to state that most of a person's daily life is governed by automatic processes triggered by features of the environment.[105] While cognition and consciousness are too complex to give precise measures of exactly how automatic we are, social psychologist John Bargh suggests approximately 99% of psychological and bodily processes are automatic[106] while Baumeister and colleagues suggest conscious thought may be causal (and important) for overall behaviour only 5% of the time.[107]

Conscious thought only really comes into its own in novel situations, since once a situation is repeated and previous expectations and patterns are activated, conscious thought becomes unnecessary.[108] A blow to self-esteem through a failure or an insult for example, mobilizes previously rehearsed patterns of thought and behaviour to automatically restore the sense of self-worth. Bargh and Chartrand comically refer to these automatic processes as "'mental butlers' who know our tendencies and preferences so well that they anticipate and take care of them for us, without having to be asked.[109]

The spiritual implications of automaticity are not self-evident because automaticity is not bad in itself, as the Philosopher Whitehead articulated so vividly:

"It is a profoundly erroneous truism, repeated by all copy-books and by eminent people when they are making speeches, that we should cultivate the habit of thinking of what we are doing. The precise opposite is the case. Civilization advances by ex-

tending the number of important operations which we can perform without thinking about them. Operations of thought are like cavalry charges in a battle — they are strictly limited in number, they require fresh horses, and must only be made at decisive moments."[110]

The point is that we are not merely 'creatures of habit' but also habit-forming creatures. You could even say that we are built to put ourselves to sleep. While this trait has adaptive value in that we use our cognitive resources efficiently, it can also render us vulnerable in certain ways.

One potential problem area arises when attempts are made to solve an adaptive challenge as a technical one, which some believe to be the most common source of leadership failure in all professional domains.[111] Adaptive challenges refer to those that require us to problematise our own role in the problem and require re-imagining and reshaping our worlds; in contrast, technical challenges can generally be solved quickly with few superficial changes, often on the basis of expert advice. Our vulnerability to automatic processing can lead individuals to apply rote technical solutions (e.g., taking medication to lower blood pressure) to fix a problem that would benefit from a more adaptive response (e.g. adopting a healthier diet and lifestyle to lower blood pressure). In other words, the human tendency for automatic action, while useful in stable or routine circumstances, can become maladaptive and even harmful when something complex or particular is happening.[112]

A second problem is that we become defined by our 'situations'. Two infamous psychological experiments on obedience to authority, one by Milgram in 1974 and another by Haney et al in 1973, represent extreme cautionary tales of unquestioned automatic processing. In both controversial studies, participants willingly engaged in harmful behaviours towards others and/or themselves, likely as a result of their automatic responses to the external demands placed upon them by an authority figure (as in Milgram's study) or by a simulated role they were asked to fill (as in Haney et al's study, made famous by Zimbardo). Initial pre-study inquiries revealed that participants did not expect to behave in the manner they did which is a useful reminder that we don't really know how our automatic systems will respond ahead of time. [113]

The good news is that it is possible to become more conscious of automatic processes. One of the main ideas to emerge from the Social Brain Steering group in year one of our project (2009) is that the dynamics of human behaviour are better captured in a three-part rather than two-part relationship.

"At the neuroscientific level, it is accurate to divide our brains into a controlled system and an automatic system, in which our automatic and largely unconscious behaviours are supplemented and informed by occasional conscious deliberation. However, when you consider the relationship of these two systems operating within the environ-

ment, our behaviour is mostly habitual, which means that we act without thinking in situations that appear familiar."[114]

Habits are important because they define who we are, but also because they can be changed. We breathe automatically, we see automatically, but we think, decide and act habitually. Habits are driven by our automatic (principally limbic) system, and often feel automatic due to the way our brains predict events, and reward us when those predications are accurate, principally through the release of the 'feel good factor' in the form of dopamine. Karl Friston has built a general theory of cognition out of this idea, which contends that our brain is continually interpreting information contextually with a view to acting in the world. We do not perceive as a prelude to considering how to act, but rather perceive in the context of available actions, and our interpretation of the world is suffused with our prediction of what we are expected to do next.[115]

Deliberation and reflection occurs when the world does not immediately conform to our predictions. The intriguing aspect of Friston's theory is that we predict in different ways, and our predictions are coloured by our self-concept and social conditioning. The ways in which our automatic and habitual processes contextualise the world below consciousness directly circumscribes our ability to learn, because it affects our openness to experience – a key determinant of our interest in spiritual matters.

Francisco Varela makes a similar claim arguing that it is principally at 'breakdowns' — moments where we do not have a habitual reaction available to respond to an unexpected stimulus, that consciousness is brought forth to reconstitute our 'micro-worlds' — to refashion our interpretation of the lived environment so that we can intelligibly act within it.[116] Spiritual training can therefore be thought of as what we need to be ready for such moments – we need not only the capacity to make ourselves present to what is happening, but also to mobilise the better aspects of our selves.

The difficulty in becoming aware of automatic processing is attributed to the high speed at which it occurs, concealing it from conscious monitoring and reflection. Research psychologist Maja Djikic posits that slowing the mind down, or "cultivating stillness", creates a gap between one's awareness and the contents of that awareness.[117] Mindfulness practices have been posited as means for cultivating such qualities. Hunter and Chaskalson explain:

The power of mindfulness arises from systematically developing a person's attention so that she can recognize in the moment how she identifies with her implicit, habitual and automated patterns of thinking, feeling and acting and the results they bring about. By recognizing these patterns, she can elect to change course. As a result mindfulness endows —"an adaptability and pliancy of mind with quickness of apt response in changing situations"[118]

Some quibble with language, and suggest "heartfulness" or "recollection" might be a better word than mindfulness, but the core point is pretty fundamental and is not about a mindfulness 'fad'.[119] American author Thoreau described this kind of cultivated awareness as the "only way of living" and Jonathan Swift famously said: "May you live every day of your life." In more explicitly spiritual literature, Gurdjieff is quoted as saying: "Man is asleep…he has no real consciousness or will. He is not free; to him, everything 'happens'. He can become conscious and find his true place as a human being in the creation, but this requires a profound transformation".[120]

As part of the research for the first edition Dr Danny Pennman said mindfulness can be thought of as a daily mental health 'vaccination': "It is a dose-response relationship". Not doing your daily practice is like 'not taking your meds'. To work with this level of interest in your own automaticity, you need repeated practice, and to find a way to keep motivation high.

There is an irony here of course. The challenge is to make spiritual practice a habit so that we become less habitual in our encounters with daily life. This approach recognises that there is no ultimate escape from habituation, just greater control over the habits we choose to have, and a greater awareness of how they arise and how they can change.

We rarely succeed in changing our habits and thereby shaping our lives in the way we want to if we 'go it alone'. Instead we tend to need what Avner Offer called 'commitment devices'. Offer argues that humans have unhitched themselves from the institutions that are protective against the inherent short-sightedness of the human condition, including religious institutions.[121]

In an RSA workshop Dr Clare Carlisle suggested that "An orientation to truth and goodness" is what gives a practice meaning and makes one want to continue, but this is a challenge for those who believe you can, for instance, completely secularise mindfulness meditation, turn it into 'attention training' and strip it of all ethical content. A related challenge is that, as social beings, we tend to need support or inspiration from others. Canadian magician Doug Henning once elegantly put the overall challenge like this:

"The hard must become habit. The habit must become easy. The easy must become beautiful."

For the hard to become habit, we need social reinforcement, for the habit to become easy we need to shape our habitats accordingly — places to practise and people to teach us or work with, and for the 'easy to become beautiful' we need social rewards, such that the new-found habit is socially endorsed. The issue is therefore not so much to change people's habits, but to make the social process of habituation more

consciously shared. One way to do that is to pay closer attention to something we all share: our bodies.

Embodied Cognition: why the experience of meaning is visceral and important

"Coming to grips with your embodiment is one of the most profound philosophical tasks you will ever face." – Mark Johnson[122]

"I don't think any one of us can begin to discover again what religion might mean unless we are prepared to expose ourselves to new ways of being in our bodies." – Rowan Williams.[123]

While western approaches to spirituality have often seen the body's desires and appetites as a distraction or barrier to spiritual life (think of film images of self-flagellation), it is also possible to see the body as the best place to start the inquiry. In this respect, it is perhaps not an accident that many in the west begin spiritual journeys with Yoga, nor that Yoga begins with asanas (bodily postures) moves on to pranayama (breathing exercises) and only then deals with meditation or any discussion of divinity.

While the body may not be a spiritual end in itself, it is helpful to recognize that all experience comes through it.[124] The simple fact is that the body is always present, while the mind is invariably elsewhere, and much of spiritual inquiry begins with the simple reconnection of body and mind through the breath that we tend to take for granted.[125]

According to neuroscientist Mario Beauregard, spiritual experiences relate to a fundamental dimension of human existence and are frequently reported across all cultures.[126] There is a strong consistency in the reported characteristics of such experiences, which seem to occur in spiritual and religious contexts[127], after ingestion of psychedelics[128], upon viewing Earth from space[129] , or even spontaneously by the religious and non-religious alike.[130] A myriad of common underlying themes suggest that spiritual experiences, regardless of their particular cognitive or emotional content, are all woven of the same psychological fabric.

Despite some notable claims of out-of-body experiences- and perhaps even then-spiritual experiences are bodily experiences. Guy Claxton argues that religions are extensions of our bodies, in the sense that they originated not from elaborate frameworks of beliefs intended to provide comfort and meaning, but rather from experiences that were actually seen, felt, and thereby, embodied. These experiences, warmly referred to as "glimpses" by Claxton when he spoke at the RSA, are described by him as follows:[131]

Spirituality concerns a particular transformation in the quality of human experience.

Spiritual experience (SE), as recorded across history and culture, has a number of core features:

A degree of aliveness and intensity that makes 'normal experience' (NE) seem vapid and attenuated

A sense of belonging and connectedness, of being part of a larger whole, of being naturally 'at home', that highlights a common background feeling of loneliness or alienation in NE

A sense of caring and compassion towards other people in general, and even aspects of nature and the environment, that makes their well-being matter in a non-possessive way, and compared to which NE seems apathetic or of less meaning

A feeling of depth; of calm connectedness and open involvement with mystery and uncertainty without any insecurity, compared with a rather anxious dogmatism – a need to feel right or certain - that attends NE

A feeling of ease and lightness, of peace, acceptance and harmony, that contrasts with a background sense of agitation, restlessness or unsatisfactoriness that seems often to accompany NE

Although precise measurements on such matters are difficult, such experiences are actually quite common. According to survey data, about half of adults have had at least one spiritual experience in their lifetimes. In the United Kingdom, the prevalence of such experiences among adults ranges from 31% to 48% across surveys (see Castro, 2010), while in the United States the number is closer to 50% (Smith, 2006). Even in China, where more than half (52.2%) of the population is unaffiliated with any religion (Pew Research Centre, 2012), 56.7% of adults report having had a spiritual experience (Yao & Badham, 2007).[132]

The renowned polymath and writer Ken Wilber has consistently argued for the broader importance of spiritual experience in the modern scientific paradigm. In the book, Sense and Soul, Wilber argues that if spirituality is to merge with 21st century science, the study of spirituality must be based on falsifiable evidence.[133] While something important will always be lost in the measurement process, spiritual experience can in principle lend itself to scientific scrutiny and falsifiability and it is no coincidence that empirical research into spiritual experiences is currently underway on multiple fronts in psychology and neuroscience.[134]

Wilber further explains, "It is only when (spirituality) emphasizes its heart and soul and essence – namely direct mystical experience… – that (it) can both stand up to modernity and offer something for which modernity has desperate need: a genuine, verifiable, repeatable injunction to bring forth the spiritual domain".

While there are perennial problems with definitions and taxonomies, a critical point is that such experiences do not feel deviant, on the contrary they feel more real, just as waking consciousness feels more real than dreaming. And part of the reason they feel real, is that they are experienced viscerally, through our bodies.

This point is supported by the fact that the importance attributed to the human body in psychological processes has been steadily on the rise.[135] Embodied cognition research has significantly increased in the past decade as the body's manifold roles in cognition and affect are systematically unpacked.[136] Cognitive linguists Mark Johnson and George Lakoff take the strongest position, arguing all concepts originate in bodily metaphors.[137] Moreover, research on bodily feelings corresponding to emotions suggests that when they are experienced in concentrated form, positive emotions such as happiness, wonder, awe, and joy, result in increased openness to transcendence and a more spiritual conception of the self, world, and others.[138]

Despite the potential joys of bodily experience, there is a good reason for spiritual ambivalence towards the body, which is that it represents an existential threat. The body aches, bleeds, grows old and weak, and eventually dies. In this way, the body acts as a constant reminder of one's mortality, and, consequently, as a supremely reliable trigger of existential anxiety.[139] Attempts are made across cultures to regulate bodily phenomena that may serve to remind people of their physical nature, evidenced by the disgust and embarrassment commonly directed at common bodily functions, the extensive efforts and elaborately imposed rules for both concealing and enhancing the body's appearance.[140]

The body is the central aspect of our 'ground', but we need not think of it as all we have or all are we are. Perhaps the most celebrated Yogi in the west, Iyengar, puts it like this:

"If we abandon or indulge our bodies, sickness comes, and attachment to it increases. Your body can no longer serve as a vehicle for the inward journey…If you say you are your body, you are wrong. If you say you are not your body, you are also wrong. The truth is that although body is born, lives and dies, you cannot catch a glimpse of the divine except through your body." [141]

Divided Brain: why our need for perspective and balance is greater than ever

With the possible exception of the heart, the brain is arguably the most important part of the body, and the structural and functional division of hemispheres is one of the most significant features of the brain.

Scientist and Philosopher Iain McGilchrist's acclaimed work, The Master and his Emissary, significantly builds on and enhances prior research by neuropsychologists Sperry and Gazzaniga into functional differences between the brain hemispheres in split-brain patients[142], by Hirstein into confabulation[143], and by Gallagher into the philosophical conception of the narrative sense of self[144]).

The essence of McGilchrist's argument might be summarized like this: We all live in two worlds and one of our worlds is under threat. A proper understanding of the relationship between the right and left hemispheres of the brain draws attention to two very different and often competing forms of perception and cognition, and makes the challenge of achieving 'balance' and perspective in life more palpable.[145]

McGilchrist puts it at follows: "Because we thought of the brain as a machine, we were asking 'what does it do?' and getting the answer 'they both do everything'. If instead we had thought of the brain as part of a person, rather than a machine, we might have asked a different question: 'what's he or she like?' How, in other words – with what values, goals, interests, in what manner and in what way – did this part of a person do what he or she did? And we would have got quite another answer. For each hemisphere has a quite consistent, but radically different, 'take' on the world. This means that, at the core of our thinking about ourselves, the world and our relationship with it, there are two incompatible but necessary views that we need to try to combine. And things go badly wrong when we do not."[146]

There are some signs that things are going badly wrong along these lines:

"The left hemisphere's obsession with reducing everything it sees to the level of minute, mechanistic detail, is robbing modern society of the ability to understand and appreciate deeper human values," McGilchrist claims. "Appeals to the natural world, to the history of a culture, to art, to the body, and to spirituality, routes that used to lead out of the hall of mirrors have been cut off, undercut and ironised out of existence."[147]

This lack of perspective is no mere cognitive blip, but feeds in to broader patterns of social breakdown. While we cannot infer direct cause and effect, the growth in 'left-hemisphere overreach', what McGilchrist believes to be the trend for cultural expression of the qualities of abstraction, measurement and algorithm, can be inferred from urbanization and its broader effects, for instance, level of lonliness in the UK are increasing, and it has been argued that the rising rates of illness are a result of an evolutionary mismatch between past human environments and modern-day living.[148]

On October 25th, 1925, Mahatma Gandhi published a list of seven social sins that, if not corrected, could potentially destroy societies and individuals and this list seems to be more relevant than ever with respect to our need for perspective and balance. The seven social sins are: "wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge

without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity, worship without sacrifice, and politics without principle."[149]

McGilchrist's research is invaluable because it shows that the part of us that is concerned with restoring that balance through context, meaning and wholeness is more tentative and less articulate than the part of us that is concerned with decontextualizing, measurement and precision, which means we have to fight that bit harder and better for the things that are difficult to articulate and measure. The point applies to the public use of 'spirituality' and 'soul', and is more broadly relevant for those who believe society's ills stem from our public language being excessively explicit and over-concerned with measurement. The case for the implicit and what Physicist David Bohm called 'the implicate order' arises from a deeper understanding of the primary division in our brain.[150]

While speaking at the second RSA workshop, McGilchrist's core contention was that, at heart, spirituality is about not "knowing". He added that the spiritual is often in places where we are not looking directly; in the background, the in-between. We tend to neglect that which is not in the foreground of experience, and we know this empirically from research on perception, not from research on cognition, reinforcing the point about attention being better understood as an aspect rather than function of consciousness.

The point is that making things more explicit does not make them better. In ritual, we see an embodied metaphor in which meaning is beyond the explicit, and this is precious. If we lose sight of the value of such rituals we are in danger of losing the distinction between mythos and logos. Iain emphasised that narrative, metaphor and implicit meaning are key to spirituality and that spirituality at its heart is about modesty, about not knowing, ending his talk with the evocative line: "Life is a superfluous gift calling for gratitude and tenderness."

Neural Plasticity: Why we need take spiritual practice seriously

"The brain is a far more open system than we ever imagined, and nature has gone very far to help us perceive and take in the world around us. It has given us a brain that survives in a changing world by changing itself." - Norman Doidge [151]

"In truth, the crossing from nature to culture and vice versa has always stood wide open. It leads across an easily accessible bridge: the practising life." - Peter Sloterdijk [152]

The idea of 'neuroplasticity' is relatively mainstream, and simply stated it refers to the brain's capacity to change itself. We can do this much more than we previously thought, but it is not often understood that plasticity significantly declines with age, nor do we typically appreciate the extent of effort required to make significant changes in general or the effort to maintain the requisite effort, or what Claxton calls 'the habit habit'. [153]

It is now a truism in sports psychology that practice doesn't make perfect, rather, practice makes permanent. [154] You become what you repeat, and what you repeat may not always be optimal or consciously chosen. The idea of practice, or practise, or praxis differ in emphasis, but they all point to the idea of self-reinforcing patterns of behaviour, and the value of a practise often grows in a kind of compound interest. [155]

The core idea is captured by the distinguished social theorist Sloterdijk: "Practice is defined here as any operation that provides or improves the actor's qualification for the next performance of the same operation, whether it is declared practice or not." [156]

There is a huge literature now on 'social practice theory' and how it informs our use of natural resources, particularly energy, [157] and the importance of practice for musical competence is well known but public awareness of the range of contemplative practices seems to be somewhat underdeveloped. The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society present a wide range of available contemplative practices that can be grouped into seven families, each facilitating the expression of a broad fundamental human need or capacity e.g. creativity, physicality, relationships, cyclical rituals and ethical generativity. [158]

In this respect, emerging evidence from psychological and neuroscientific research helps to contextualise the value of such practices. Studies have found significant evidence that repeating a certain experience over an extended period of time (a habit, in other words) actually changes the size of the brain region(s) associated with that experience, but the point is not so much about neuroanatomical size, rather it is about connections between existing neurons, and to some extent the creation of new ones. [159]

It follows that accessing the "fruits" of spiritual practice may only be accessible through habit and consistency. If part of spiritual practice is about seeking "a transfor-

mation that can ultimately alter and orient one's life" [160]and such transformation entails the development of several elusive qualities and human virtues like empathy, compassion, humility, patience, sacrifice, and others, then the case for fostering a culture of practice is very strong.

In this regard, research is already indicating that mindfulness meditation serves as a means for developing compassion and empathy. Other studies support the requirement of long-term habitual practice to develop these deeper emotional qualities.[161]Over time, spiritual practices appear to effect the structural changes in our brains that likely reflect the forms of spiritual transformation recounted by various spiritual leaders and sacred texts.

This evidence tallies with the general verdict of workshop participants; the value of spiritual practice largely depends both on the perspective of the practitioner and on the persistence with which it is practised. In addition to Danny Penman's reference to 'dose-response relationship', Clare Carlisle argues that continual spiritual practice gives natural and spontaneous rise to other beneficial habits.

There is a key paradox at work in spiritual practice, however, such that practice must become consistent and habitual in order to fulfil the spiritual aim of moving beyond the practice itself. In our second workshop, Rabbi Naftali Brewer says habits can be seen as "duties of the heart" rather than activities of the body, and the creation and maintenance of habits are at least partly about socialising a faith community i.e. "there is something more sacred than the habit".

Naftali quoted H.J. Eschel's quote in this regard, "Prayer is a window, not a screen," as the key to prayer is the development of a capacity to feel beyond the words.

The point is that habits often remain even after the rationale for the habit is forgotten or superseded. In this respect, over-fastidious attention to rituals can undermine the very values they are espousing e.g. mind and heart in state of submission to higher power.

On the other hand, Naftali added that habits can also be the trigger i.e. the relatively mindless repetition of the practice is the thing that brings one's mind to a more open, receptive, 'non habitual' space. In other words, spiritual practice is partly about cultivating that discrimination between doing things by rote out of the habit of doing them by rote, and doing so with a deeper appreciation for the liberating qualities of repetition Naftali made reference to "pre and post-meaning naiveties" and wished people 'a second naiveté'.

The more one engages with spiritual practice, the more it seems to develop, deepen and complexify as a result. For instance, Elizabeth Oldfield compared the development of Christian prayer to the deepening of a friendship, although she emphasised

that there is a sense of asymmetrical wisdom in the actual experience of prayer.

Clare Carlisle argued that one's attitude to habits is very closely connected to one's idea of freedom.[162] However, for something to be habitual does not mean it is unfree: "Freedom is the uninhibited expression of our own nature. Not rational choice." The point was developed through the thought of Ravission: "Practice wills the repetition". The interplay of receptivity and resistance shapes our ethical and religious life, so meditation, for instance, is both about becoming receptive to some things and resistant to others.

Sloterdijk puts the point forcibly: "It is time to reveal humans as the beings who result from repetition. Just as the nineteenth century stood cognitively under the sign of production and twentieth under that of reflexivity, the future should present itself under the sign of the exercise."[163]

The six relationships outlined in this section, connecting Scientific findings with aspects of spiritual life or experience form an important part of any argument for spirituality playing a larger role in the public realm. Taken together, these features of human nature show that the human need for the spiritual arises out of basic aspects of our physiology, psychology and sociology.

Spirituality does not thereby become a monolith. Believing is fundamentally social, but beliefs will differ, the sacred is universal, but lines of the sacred will be drawn differently, we are all an auto-pilot by default, but people will be relatively 'awake' or 'asleep' to differing extents, we can all taste the numinous, but spiritual experiences will range in frequency, meaning, duration and intensity; we all live in two different perceptual worlds, but some balance these worlds better than others; and we would all benefit from some form of spiritual practice, but nobody can say exactly where we should begin.

Spirituality therefore has some universal forms and structures but varying content. The challenge for us now is how to deepen the discussion in that context. How can we best speak of the spiritual in a way that helps us understand how best to live?

Part Three

Spiritual touchstones: Love, death, self and soul

"We should find the center of our spiritual lives beyond the code (of morals and laws) deeper than the code, in networks of living concern which are not to be sacrificed to the code, which must even from time to time subvert it."
-Charles Taylor [164]

Arising out of the foregoing understanding of the human 'ground', there is a cultural challenge to restructure our understanding of how the spiritual manifests, and why it matters. The task is to prevent our shared understanding of the spiritual collapsing into those more familiar and comfortable ideas that hover around it; the theological, cultural, ethical, aesthetic, emotional, scientific, mystical, psychological, and sociological; even though it contains elements of all of them, it is important to give spirituality conceptual integrity of its own that can be spoken of in accessible ways.

From our workshops, literature review and public events it became clear we need to try work within certain core cultural discourses about themes that that connect us at the deepest, most universal level. Love, death, self and soul were selected, not as an exhaustive or exclusive map, but as four main aspects of human existence that currently seem to be denied, distorted or misrepresented, but which should be a larger part of the public conversation because they are all right at the heart of our lives.

Love (The promise of belonging)

"'God is Love' became 'love is God'." – Simon May[165]

The centrality of love emerges from the emphasis on relationships arising from the social brain, the moral function of the sacred, and the role of practise in strengthening patterns of affect and behaviour.

Love has become almost synonymous with attraction and desire and romance, but these points of emphasis obscure a much deeper phenomenon. Jules Evans was one among a number of workshop participants who felt that love was an under-discussed element of spirituality. Speaking of his own transformative experiences, recounted in his book Philosophy for Life, Evans spoke of how the experience of love sometimes allows for a 'reset' of everything in one's life. Andrew Powell and Robert Rowland Smith alluded to the timeless quality of the experience of love, and indicated that we can't give depth to the spiritual without a direct appreciation its role in our lives.

But how exactly can we do that?

The anthropologist Helen Fisher has come to think of love as "one of the most powerful brain systems on earth for both great joy and great sorrow." The human longing for love has also been described as a quest to fill a deeply profound void. In the book Love: A History, philosopher Simon May describes love as, "the rapture we feel for people and things… [that] sets us off on – and sustains – the long search for a secure relationship between our being and others." [166]

Love is associated with the desire to belong, which various psychologists view as an integral part of what makes us human[167]. May further explains, "If we all have a need for love, it is because we all need to feel at home in the world." The erosion of religious affiliation and the sense of displacement in a globalizing world place increased pressures on our capacity to "feel at home in the world," and, by definition, to love.

Among the many forms of love that a person can experience, the "highest" form of love is often associated with spirituality. Religions, for instance, are known to attribute unconditional love exclusively to divine beings. For instance, the Bible states: "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love[168]." According to Simon May, our modern idealized notion of romantic love is actually based on the unconditional form of divine love that is evident throughout the Bible – though perhaps most recognizably in Corinthians:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.

These biblical conceptions of a "love that never fails" can be found in the pres-

ent day notions of "eternal love" and "living happily ever after". May explains that modern ideas of romantic love have been hijacked from religious contexts, suffering a fundamental distortion in the process. Personal relationships are thus burdened by tacit expectations of unconditional love, ultimately resulting in dissatisfaction and disillusionment with the relationship. "To its immense cost," May argues, "human love has usurped a role that only God's love used to play." In further support of this view, various scholars on the subject view the notion of unconditional love as "mythical" and practically unattainable by humans. This then begs the question of why we find the notion of unconditional love so compelling that we judge our relationships by it.

The search for unconditional love may in fact be a manifestation of a deeper human longing for what Simon May calls "ontological rootedness." Life is naturally bereft of certainty and our bodies and personalities undergo several evolutions, to the point that recognizing the person we were several years ago becomes a challenge. With the passage of time, our friends and loved ones undergo the same processes of change. Change is perpetual and pervasive and a love that is unfailing, everlasting, and unconditional represents an antidote to the transient nature of life, holding the promise of providing what May calls "an indestructible grounding for one's life."

Historically, such grounding was originally found in religion, spirituality, and the sacred. In his book, We: Understanding the Psychology of Romantic Love, Robert Johnson writes,

"So much of our lives is spent in a longing and a search – for what, we do not know. So many of our ostensible "goals", so many of the things we think we want, turn out to be the masks behind which our real desires hide; they are symbols for the actual values and qualities for which we hunger. They are not reducible to physical or material things, not even to a physical person; they are psychological qualities: love, truth, honesty, loyalty, purpose – something we can feel is noble, precious, and worthy of our devotion. We try to reduce all this to something physical – a house, a car, a better job, or a human being – but it doesn't work. Without realizing it, we are searching for the Sacred. And the sacred is not reducible to anything else." [169]

In the RSA event on love Mark Vernon, echoing CS Lewis, offered 4 conceptions of love, but offered a developmental perspective.[170] The earlier transitions bring the realization that another person exists who, not just gives, but receives love as well (from the first to second forms of love), and that people can nourish and be supported by various forms of love (from the second to third forms of love). The final and most complex form of love is spiritual in nature. Saint Augustine described this capacity for love as one that "reaches not just for others or for life, but for nothing less than the infinite." In other words, the fourth form of love relates to those elements that transcend people, things, and the self; the individual may realize that love is not dependent on any one person or thing, but rather that love is "already flowing through us," and has, "in a sense,

already made us." As in Corinthians above, this is a love that does not seek to possess or create, but just is.

We can catch a glimpse of this experience of love when we find ourselves welling up with emotion about things we deeply identify with. The centrality of love is closely connected to our extended period of infancy when we need to rely on others for so long, and perhaps we feel that deep interdependence more than we are allowed to express in an individualistic culture.

What appears to be missing are discussions of how love and will come together, a key theme in the growing Psychosynthesis movement. As Devorah Baum indicated, maternal love has a ferocity; it's not passive or even particularly peaceful. Simon May argues that it is thanks to our desire for ontological rootedness that we can 'unleash the will to value, defend, affirm, empathise with, and give to the supremely loved one in the most intense way possible' [171]

If we allow our experience of love to make our existential 'ground' clear to us, and even moves us to tears, how do we harness that deep wellspring of meaning and power to act in the world? Martin Luther King seemed to recognize that this was our fundamental challenge:

"Power properly understood is …the strength required to bring about social political, and economic change… One of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites- polar opposites- so that love is identified with the resignation of power and power with the denial of love. Now we've got to get this thing right…Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anaemic…It is precisely this collision of immoral power with powerless morality which constitutes the major crisis of our time." [172]

The spiritual injunction here is to tap into the deep sources of our own power and love, and embark on the lifelong challenge of bringing them together in practice. In many ways that challenge is the overarching spiritual challenge that this book seeks to draw attention to.

Death (the awareness of being)

"I face up to death but then I flip back into denial. Surely that's what it's like? I lie in bed in the small hours of the morning, absolutely terrified by the apprehension of my own dissolution…And then I go to sleep and wake up in the morning and make toast."

- Will Self[173]

Given that the etymological root of spirituality means vitality or aliveness, it may seem paradoxical to argue that death is at the heart of it. Still, death becomes an unavoidable subject of inquiry when you reflect on the fact we live and age mostly on auto-pilot, and that our bodies are mortal. Death is the quintessential feature of our existential 'ground', and the discomfort we have in facing up to it is a large part of the reason we prefer to focus our lives on our social or economic 'place'. Moreover, as the greatest human uncertainty, death is often regarded as a major stimulus for the origin of religion.[174]

In our first workshop we experienced perhaps the most intense moment of the entire project when our guest speaker Sam Sullivan, President of Global Civic Policy Society and former Mayor of Vancouver offered a captivating account of the spiritual dimensions of his sustained political commitment. He suffered a skiing accident when he was nineteen, which left him quadriplegic, in a wheelchair for life. Soon after the accident, while contemplating suicide, he imagined his own death in vivid, visceral and bloody terms. After meticulously simulating the gunshot in his imagination, he described how he felt, now as the witness to his own continued breathing, noticing with singular intensity the sensation that remained in his disabled body, but highly functional mind; only now from a renewed, life-affirming perspective: "There seems to be some helpful movement, I thought...Somebody could do something with that. Hey, I could do something with that."

This simulated death experience brought him out of despair, and sustained spiritual practice related to stoicism helped him forge a celebrated career in disability activism and public service which continues.[175]

Sam Sullivan's case is striking, but there is a large literature on near-death experiences (NDEs) and post-traumatic growth (PTG) that suggests it is part of a familiar pattern. Close encounters with death are often referred to as "spiritual catalysts" that can result in surprisingly positive outcomes for the individual.[176] Those who report NDEs, for instance, by either coming close to dying or actually reaching 'clinical death', describe profound shifts in deeply-held views. The most common shifts are characterized as: greater appreciation for life, concern for others, acceptance of death/mortality, concern for meaning, heightened sense of spirituality, and lack of concern for materialism and impressing others.[177]

In his celebrated Stanford commencement speech, Steve Jobs contextualized why death is a spiritual catalyst as follows:

"Remembering you are going to die is the best way of avoiding the trap of thinking you have something to lose. You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow

your heart." – Steve Jobs.[178]

Beyond all the great contributions, my main reflection concerns the connection between the public salience of death and research in the social psychology of values championed by the 'Common Cause' approach to social change[179]. One of their leading tenets is that appealing to extrinsic motivations (fame, money, status) can be a technical solution to short term behaviour change, but it will undermine long term behaviour change which requires an alignment of intrinsic values (love, nature, craft) with the desired change. If reflecting on our own deaths tends to promote intrinsic values and weaken extrinsic values, and concealing death has the opposite effect, our cultural representations of death clearly have much greater political and economic implications than we tend to realise.

So why don't we do just that? Because death is terrifying, and facing up to it requires extraordinary courage. In the Pulitzer-Prize winning book, The Denial of Death, cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker writes:

The idea of death, the fear of it, haunts the human animal like nothing else; it is a mainspring of human activity - designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way that it is the final destiny of man.[180]

In Social psychology, terror management theory (tmt) originated as an empirical framework for Ernest Becker's ideas and has since spawned hundreds of published studies[181]. The theory holds that reminders of one's own death (i.e., mortality salience) trigger existential anxiety and give rise to a host of unsavory unconscious behaviors and defenses to alleviate it.[182]

In general, thoughts of death prompt individuals to hold on more rigidly to their current worldviews and beliefs. In over 300 peer-reviewed scientific studies, participants responded to reminders of death by more strongly holding onto and defending their cultural worldviews, whatever they happen to be. For instance, when examined through a political lens, death anxiety promoted aggression towards people with rival political beliefs and support for charismatic leaders with shared beliefs[183]. More generally, increased mortality salience leads to more favourable judgments of similar others, less favourable views of dissimilar others, greater discomfort when one personally violates a cultural norm, harsher penalties prescribed for the cultural transgressions of others, and an increased sense of greed.[184] The increased in-group bias and out-group prejudice observed in Americans during the aftermath of 9/11 provides a real-world illustration of these effects.[185] Surprisingly, even very subtle or indirect reminders of mortality, such as mere attention to one's own body or a comparison of humans to animals[187], can activate our defences against the threat that death represents.[186]

As our first speaker in the RSA public event on death, Philosopher Stephen Cave

put it:

"Death is a Taboo, maybe our last taboo...Death shifts you into a different gear...If you are religious you'll now be feeling more religious. If you are patriotic you'll now be feeling more patriotic. Whatever the core of your worldview is, because we've mentioned the death word, you'll now be holding on to it more tightly and will more aggressively defend it."[188]

At face value, there is therefore conflicting evidence; awareness of death appears to focus our lives for the better, but it also leads to a kind of toxic tribal entrenchment. This is where the emphasis on experience and practice that spirituality offers has explanatory power and social significance. The psychological defences just described apply to cognitive reminders of death but not to actual lived encounters with death. In an excellent e-book 'Meeting Environmental Challenges', Tom Crompton and Tim Kasser review the evidence from social psychology to make the point very clearly: brief reminders of mortality tends to activate values of self-interest and destructive impulses (pp.19-22) but the most striking example came from participants in writing in a simulated forestry-management scenario, in which briefly writing about their own deaths lead them to want to chop down more trees. However, a sustained, reflective meditation on death can increase concern for others (human and non-human).[189]

This modern evidence chimes well with spiritual traditions. In our public event on death, Dr. Joanna Cook gave a vivid account of an experience that formed part of being a Buddhist nun in Thailand: "I was given a photographic atlas of the body and I was asked to meditate on it. So the idea here is that one sits with the images of dissected corpses and then imaginatively extends one's understanding of the photos into one's understanding of one's own person. Now at first it was really frightening, and then exhilarating and then quite transformative. But initially I had to leave the book outside at night."

Such practices may seem bizarre or morbid by Western social standards, but they allow human minds to reach a sort of psychological truce with our mortal enemy in the most literal sense. Dr. Cook elegantly articulates this notion: "...there's no cheating death here; the meditator learns to stare down the vertiginous fact of her own mortality, unflinchingly and intentionally. And it's in so doing that religious principles move from propositional beliefs into experiential reality..."

Echoing this point about religions grasping the need to know death experientially, Will Self remarked that Christianity 'does death well', even to the extent of engendering belief in God[190]:

"When I say, as an agnostic, that religion does death well, what I mean is, that the part of me that is a genuine agnostic is swayed, under the influence of a Christian funer-

al. I couldn't believe I think they do it well if I was sitting there thinking this is obviously… Sky-God nonsense, clearly part of me is responding."[191] (c37.10)

The point is that if you are going to 'do' death, it is important to do it well, and not least because doing so offers clarity into what is most meaningful in life. Consider that Bronnie Ware, a palliative nurse, distilled the five most common regrets of dying individuals from numerous first-hand accounts (Ware, 2012a):

I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me.

I wish I didn't work so hard.

I wish I'd had the courage to express my feelings.

I wish I had stayed in touch with my friends.

I wish that I had let myself be happier.

Insofar as the five listed regrets are considered to be "emotionally meaningful," they may all be mediated by the construct of authenticity (even the second goal, "I wish I didn't work so hard," was reported to work in service of nourishing interpersonal relationships). Authenticity has been defined as the unhindered expression of one's true or core self in daily life.[192] The essence of this construct is plainly described in Kübler-Ross and Kessler's book, Life lessons: Two experts on death and dying teach us about the mysteries of life and living. The authors write, "Deep inside all of us, we know there is someone we were meant to be. And we can feel when we're becoming that person. The reverse is also true. We know when something's off and we're not the person we were meant to be" (2001).

Realizing that one is approaching death seems to have a significant impact on the types of goals they pursue. According to socio-emotional selectivity theory (SST), as a person begins to view their time as limited (rather than abundant or open-ended), the types of goals they pursue change from acquisition of knowledge/resources to the regulation of emotion.[193] In other words, when we realize that our time in life is finite, we prioritize emotionally meaningful goals and experiences. In these circumstances, people tend to forego maintaining many superficial relationships in favour of deepening the few deemed most significant. This general family of shifts has been correlated with increased emotional experiences and wellbeing in late life.[194]

Self (the path of becoming)

"What the advertiser needs to know is not what is right with the product but what is

wrong about the buyer." - Neil Postman[195]

"Why are you unhappy? Because 99.9 percent of everything you think, and of everything you do, is for yourself—and there isn't one." - Wei Wu Wei[196]

There appear to be four main perspectives on the spiritual significant of the self, all of which contain implicit injunctions that appear to pull us in different directions.

Let go!

First, and most fundamental, there is the metaphysical idea that the self is not real, which entails an injunction to reduce our attachment to particular ideas of who and what we are. This could be thought of as the injunction to: let go! As Robert Rowland Smith put it in the second RSA workshop: "To be spiritual, in a radical sense, means not to be oneself."

Grow!

Second, there are models in humanistic-, developmental- and transpersonal psychology, and in psychotherapy, that point to pathways for the maturation and integration of the self, namely: grow! As Labour MP Chris Ruane put it: "People speak about one world. My party speaks about one nation. I think we need to be one person."[197]

Be yourselves!

Third, in theoretical sociology and psychology the self is presented as being subject to a proliferation of contexts and expectations through urbanization, globalization and social media, and some have argued that these external changes are so fundamental that we are advised not to seek to integrate, but, like Walt Whitman's saying 'I contain multitudes', to accept this 'multiphrenia' as an essential feature of modern life, namely: Be yourselves![198] Buddhist psychotherapist Mark Epstein may not share this theoretical tradition, but he makes a similar point: "We are all engaged in a futile struggle to maintain ourselves in our own image."[199]

Be still!

Fourth, there is the phenomenological or narrative perspective of self-consciousness, referred to by social psychologist Mark Leary as the most distinctive feature of being human, and what he calls 'the curse of the self.'[200] This chatter of self-creation and self-concern is something that spiritual practice is often directly targeted at reducing, with the injunction amounting to: be still! As writer Tim Parks puts it: "As words and thought are eased out of the mind, so the self weakens. There is no narrative to feed it…. 'Self" it turns out, is an idea we invented, a story we tell ourselves. It needs language to survive."[201]

While we cannot analyze or integrate all of these perspectives in detail, they all inform what follows. What is clear is that we live in a culture built around the needs of the self, but we are not particularly clear on what the self is, or what it really needs. We speak of self-confidence, self-esteem, self-centred behaviour, self-righteousness, self-help, selfishness, selflessness and so forth. There are theories of the ecological self, the saturated self, the divided self, the protean self, the quantified self and in 2013, 'selfie' was even voted word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries. And if this world of literal and figurative selfies sometimes seems a bit unreal, it might be because the self is a bit unreal too.

Dr. Sam Harris, neuroscientist, atheist and experienced Buddhist meditator writes, "There is no discrete self or ego living like a minotaur in the labyrinth of the brain. And the feeling that there is—the sense of being perched somewhere behind your eyes, looking out at a world that is separate from yourself—can be altered or entirely extinguished."[202]

That's an important statement, echoing the theory of 'annata' in Buddhist psychology and Western philosophy going back at least to Hume, but it's not the full picture[203]. Even if the self is not objectively 'real' in the sense of being substantial, stable and unchanging, the idea of the self has personal and cultural meanings that are subjectively and inter-subjectively important. 'Self', 'personality' and 'identity' have slightly different points of emphasis, but you can sense the central importance of the self to spirituality by considering Psychoanalyst Erik Ericson's credible statement: "In the social jungle of human existence there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity"[204] Then juxtapose that idea with Mark Epstein's remark that the spiritual is 'whatever takes us beyond the personality'.

Across different philosophical and religious traditions it seems that spiritual growth is partly about the development and integration of what we think of as the self, but also a progressive awareness that the self we are working with, and through, and for, is in an important sense unreal; in light of this fundamental equivocation, there is value in thinking of the self as 'virtual'.[205]

We are most familiar with the term virtual from the idea of 'virtual reality' and 'virtually' typically means 'almost real'. Francisco Varela, a neuroscientist, meditator and continental philosopher argues that the self can be thought of as 'virtual' in the sense that it seems real, and functions as if it were real, but on closer inspection it turns out to be insubstantial, without any ontological substratum. The self is experienced as a totality, and this illusion matters because many of our maladaptive behaviours arise from our attempts to grasp and construct this totality, thereby making it difficult for our truer, better but more contingent natures to emerge. One analogue that gives this claim some initial plausibility is the selfless nature of the experience of expertise, particularly the experience of 'flow'[206] , which is often associated with the absence of self-consciousness:

"When one is the action, no residue of self-consciousness remains to observe the action externally. When non-dual action is ongoing and well-established, it is experienced as grounded in a substrate both at rest and at peace. To forget one's self is to realise one's emptiness, to realise that's one's every characteristic is conditioned and conditional. Every expert knows this sensation of emptiness well."[207, 208]

If we think of the self as virtual, then "whenever we find regularities such as laws or social roles and conceive of them as externally given, we have succumbed to the fallacy of attributing substantial identity to what is really an emergent property of a complex, distributed process mediated by social interactions"[209]. Buddhist theorist David Loy explains why this matters:

"Our deepest problem is a spiritual one. Since that word is not respectable in some circles and too respectable in some others, let me emphasise the special sense of the word as it is employed in the interpretation of Buddhism that follows. Our problem is spiritual insofar as what is necessary is a metanoia, a turning around or rather a letting-go, at our empty core…That sense of separation from the world is what motivates me to try to secure myself within it, but according to Buddhism the only satisfactory resolution is to realise I am not other than it."[210]

Buddhism is not for everybody, but a very similar idea is evident in Western thought and 'succumbing to the fallacy' is precisely what cultural and market influences often lead us to do by treating us not only as 'consumers', but as consumers with particular consumption preferences that serve to prop up more or less coveted identities. Indeed much of social and economic life is about scrambling to make real and whole something that can perhaps only ever be virtual and patched together. Theoretical psychologist Kenneth Gergen puts it like this:

"As the traditional individual is thrust into an ever-widening array of relationships, he or she begins increasingly to sense the self as a strategic manipulator. Caught in often contradictory or incoherent activities, one grows anguished over the violation of one's sense of identity."[211]

That type of fragmented experience of self may be familiar to many, but Gergen's point is that it may be we have to go through this experience of feeling 'saturated' by the strain of curating all these identities to reach a richer equilibrium:

"As Saturation continues, this initial stage is superseded by one in which one senses the raptures of multitudinous being. In casting 'the true' and 'the identifiable' to the wind, one opens an enormous world of potential…The final stage in this transition to the postmodern is reached when the self vanishes fully into a stage of relatedness. One ceases to believe in a self independent of the relations in which he or she is embedded"[212]

Ray Lifton goes further, developing this point directly in opposition to the idea that the self is unreal:

"Whatever the claim of Eastern disciplines or Western mysticism, there is no real "escape from self." Our very experience of high states in which we seem to move beyond the self are testimony to its range and possibility. And the quest (in Zen Buddhism, for instance) for formlessness is, in actuality, an effort to have achieved, upon one's "return," changes or alterations in the self's forms. Those forms always include what (Charles) Taylor calls "common space" with other human beings—shared structures having to do with family, ethnic groups, society, and culture, as well as with innate psychobiological tendencies that are the "common space" of humankind." [213]

Gergen and Lifton's remarks are consonant with the argument above about the social brain and relational consciousness being a key aspect of the spiritual. Perhaps the best answer to the abstract metaphysical question of whether we have a self, is the conviction, through our experience, that our self becomes real through our relationships with others.

Coming to know your self as virtual in experience, for instance through certain forms of meditation, therefore has a transformative effect because we (rightly) cease to think of 'I' as our true centre, and the resulting shift in our view of who we are changes how we function in relation to others. In this context, Buddhist psychotherapist John Welwood's warnings about 'spiritual bypassing' are important, namely the danger of trying to shore up a shaky sense of self with personal spiritual practices alone, rather than through the complex emotional and psychological work involved in improving human relationships.[214]

While we may glimpse the self's virtuality in fleeting moments, to live it experientially may require a prior integration of the psyche that is built not upon meditation but rather upon life experience, relational work, even therapy. On this account, self is the territory where spiritual progress depends on strengthening and integrating on the one hand (even if what is integrated is a more resilient multiphrenia) but seeking to transcend on the other. As psychiatrist and meditator Jack Engler says: "You have to be somebody before you can be nobody."

The spiritual problem is that both – being somebody and being nobody - are easier said than done. The process of trying to be somebody is partly about your actions in the world, but these are always accompanied by an inner monologue. We have a built a culture and an economy that requires us to curate and choreograph an identity for the world, but this process of construction has a live commentary - an ongoing cacophony of self-concern and self-justification that undermines the quality of our lives and our capacity to be present for others. In our third workshop Jules Evans calls this judgmental inner monologue his 'inner Fox news'.

Our culture praises and encourages people to create their own personal 'brand image', and once this story is cast, it becomes locked-in. With this problematic inner life in mind, Matthew Taylor's suggestion that we need "an idea of individual aspiration linked to self-discipline and self-knowledge as well as self-expression" seems timely.[215] There are such ideas, of course, as we argued in Beyond the Big Society: Psychological Foundations of Active Citizenship. The idea that we grow in 'mental complexity'- our capacity to disembed our perspective from our immediate experience - is familiar from Piagetian theories of childhood development, and informs education policy, but is strangely absent from the behavioural turn in policy and public discourse more generally, perhaps because the notional hierarchy within adulthood, rather than between adults and children, is politically sensitive.[216]

But on that point, we really need to grow up. The literature on post-formal thinking (i.e. beyond the mental development of an eighteen year old) indicates that a meaningful change in the quality and efficacy of at least some forms of social productivity will require people to be able to disembed themselves from certain social and psychological influences that undermine autonomy, responsibility and solidarity, so that they can relate to those influences more flexibly and constructively. This kind of growth is 'vertical' in the sense that it changes how we know the world rather than 'horizontal' in the sense of changing what we know about the world. Such models of mental complexity are theoretically highly developed, and amenable to empirical measurement.

In light of the explanatory power of this perspective, when policy makers try to change behaviour through conventional policy instruments like incentive structures, environmental influences and choice architectures, Harvard Professor Robert Kegan argues they show "an astonishingly naïve sense of how important a factor is the level of mental complexity".

Notions of human growth and transformation are deeply rooted in both spirituality and psychology. Some psychologists have devoted their careers to researching how people can, and sometimes do, transform psychologically throughout their lives, while religious scholars have suggested that the ultimate purpose of spirituality is to transform the individual – from one kind of person into another kind of person. Strikingly, the Buddha referred to meditation practice as bhāvanā, which literally means "development."

In the third RSA workshop, Oliver Robinson noted that the literal opposite of develop (fold out) is to envelope (fold in). When asked to elaborate by email he wrote: "The word development means to reveal, the opposite of envelope, which means to conceal or wrap up. Development in the modern world has been generally conceived as increase; enhancing complexity, accretion of new ideas, growth, scaling up, but the origins of the word mean a taking off. In contrast to the general modern trend towards development as more-ness, spirituality has (to a degree) remained allied to that original meaning of the word development, emphasising things like; reduce thought chatter,

find your inner light, stop talking so much, unlearn things, become still and simple, take off your social mask, be spontaneous, and allow your creative impulses and emotions spontaneous release."

Nobel-prize winning physiologist Albert Szent-Gyorgi recently said he found it impossible to explain the mysteries of biological development "without supposing an innate 'drive' in living matter to perfect itself"[217]. This drive, he believed, led organisms to grow and achieve greater levels of complexity, organization, order, and harmony. Carl Rogers, a founding figure of psychotherapy, observed this "innate drive" in his clinical work. "We can say that there is in every organism, at whatever level, an underlying flow of movement toward constructive fulfilment of its inherent possibilities"[218]. Rogers refers to this underlying flow toward growth as an organism's "actualizing tendency'".

The picture of the self as spiritual terrain is therefore rich and complicated and hard to distill, but at its heart there is a process of becoming, and it is up to us to speak more clearly of that process, and consider the educational and cultural antecedents of what we become.

Soul (the sense of beyondness)

"Whatever our souls are made of, his and mine are the same." - Kathy in Wuthering Heights[219]

"That's the point: we need a word that's hard to define, because, if we define it, we'll probably miss the point altogether." - Iain McGilchrist on 'the soul'[220]

If the self is a complicated subject – difficult to understand, the soul is a complex one- difficult to articulate. It is about human experience in its broadest possible context, and that breadth militates against precision. As RD Laing put it:

"I cannot experience your experience. You cannot experience my experience. We are both invisible men. All men are invisible to one another. Experience used to be called The Soul."[221]

The soul gets at the idea of being human in the context of the depth and breadth of humanity, rather than being a particular person in the context of a single life. The soul is about our experience as such, while the self is about the commentary we give to experience.

While this distinction between self and soul is helpful, McGilchrist's point about the limitations of defining the soul is fundamental to understanding what the soul is. It's not just that we can't define it, but that the value of the concept is precisely to show up the limitations of the mentality that seeks definitions. As James Hilman put it: "The soul is

less an object of knowledge than it is a way of knowing the object, a way of knowing knowledge itself." In McGilchrist's terms, the soul is dispositional, more of a process than an entity, and more of a 'how' than a 'what'.

This point bears repeating, because it is easy to nod in assent without really feeling it. Again Hillman puts it succinctly: "The soul is a deliberately ambiguous concept, resisting all definition, in the same manner as do all ultimate symbols which provide the root metaphors for the systems of human thought."   McGilchrist lists a few: "Mind, matter, nature, gravity, time, energy and God, all fall into this category. We can't really say what they are at all."

This embrace of ambiguity is transgressive in important ways. In a late capitalist culture that has become ever more fixated on definition, measurement and financialisation, the soul serves as a crucial bulwark to preserve intrinsic meaning and value. McGilchrist puts it like this: "There's a danger, in my terms, of the left hemisphere having to collapse things too quickly into something familiar, 'what is it precisely?', leaving, therefore, no place for the intuited and the implicit, through which alone all great ideas in art, in religion, and in our lives are communicated. Making things more explicit doesn't actually make them easier to understand: it means we understand something other than what it is we are seeking to know."

With this implicate understanding in mind, it seems safe to say that we already know what the soul is, it's only when asked to make that knowledge explicit that we run into trouble. The challenge is that the conventional wisdom among most scientists and analytic philosophers is that the soul is mostly a religious and pre-modern folksy notion that makes no sense with respect to modern understandings of our evolved bodies and brains.

However, if you don't move in those kinds of sanitized intellectual orbits – and most people don't - the apparent death of the soul might cause bemusement. Even if we don't adhere to a religious or even philosophical (technically 'ontological') account of individual souls, it's not so easy just to discard the notion. Sometimes words capture elements of experience that we lose forever when those words disappear. As Iain McGilchrist put it in his talk at the RSA:

"Nowadays it's become a kind of embarrassment to talk about the soul; and yet until now it has been central to most cultures. The word has disappeared. And language is an aspect of reality. If it's true, as Wittgenstein said, that philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by language, making something disappear by language could bewitch us into thinking it didn't exist."

Our awkwardness towards speaking of the spiritual may be quite closely related to the loss of authority we feel in the meaning of the soul. The idea of immaterial substanc-

es inhering in individuals is still held by some, but the notion that if you don't subscribe to that particular idea of the soul, you can't speak of the soul at all is deeply problematic. Losing 'the soul' means losing an essential reference point for qualities of human experience that are deeply valuable not just despite but because they are inherently difficult to articulate.

The point of distinguishing between self and soul to put clear water between something we take for granted that is actually problematic or even unreal; something we need to work on – the self, and something we tend to neglect and undervalue, but which should become a much more salient part of our lives; something we need to be receptive to and deeply grateful for - the soul.

Theologian Keith Ward puts it like this:

"The whole point of talking of the soul is to remind ourselves constantly that we transcend all the conditions of our material existence; that we are always more than the sum of our chemicals, our electrons, our social roles or our genes…We transcend them precisely in being indefinable, always more than can be seen or described, subjects of experience and action, unique and irreplaceable."

In this respect, 'Soul' is not anti-scientific, it's anti-scientistic; it is consistent with a respect for the scientific method but challenges scientific overreach into philosophy and ideology. From a materialist perspective Nicholas Humphrey argues that humans actually live in 'the soul niche' and he means niche in the conventional ecological sense of the term – the environment to which we are adapted. "Trout live in rivers, gorillas in forests, bedbugs in beds. Humans live in soul land."[222]

Humphrey adds that 'Soul land' is a territory of the spirit and also that this spiritual territory is not only where humans live, but also where they give of their best. Reclaiming the soul is also therefore partly about placing creative expression at the centre of people's lives. Consider the expression of artist Edward Hopper: "If you could say it, there would be no need to paint it"[223] or as the poet and dramatist Victor Hugo put it: "Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent."[224]

The language of soul and soulfulness has enormous value for the arts broadly conceived and part of the reason we need to find the courage to speak of the soul, is because it is the authentic language of the arts in a way that cost-benefit social return on investment calculations never can be.

The final point about the soul is what follows from this analysis for individual souls, and here we can be unequivocal: we have souls! They are not separate from our material conditions, but they are no less real for that:

"The whole of creation is about the making of things particular out of things that are

whole…the soul is that which seems to me not to be in any way opposed to material existence, but transcends it. It's not separate from the material, in the way that a wave is not separate from the water; and yet the form, the force field, the thing that shapes it, the thing in which it's instantiated, is something concrete and not concrete at the same time."[225]

Reclaiming the language of the soul in general, and of our own souls, therefore gives us greater capacity to fight for aspects of life that have intrinsic value. When Sting sings "Let your soul be your pilot", we know what he means, and that may be partly because, as Tracy Chapman sings: "All that you have is your soul."

The main point of this section was to draw out the features of human need, evasion, identification and context in languages that are universal: love, death, self and soul. In each case, an examination seems to yield an implicit injunctive message. With love, it is: know me, and belong. With death: know me, and live a deeper life. With self: know me, and transform. With soul: know me and create.

It is time to consider what might follow from the spread of such spiritual knowledge.

Part Four

Sketches of a more soulful society

"If spirit is a name for the resistant and transcending faculties of the agent, we can spiritualize society. We can diminish the distance between who we are and what we find outside of ourselves."
-Roberto Unger[226]

In part one it was argued that while the spiritual cannot be strictly defined, it has a complex relationship with both religion and wellbeing; it is a signpost for a range of touchstones, particularly meaning, the sacred and transcendence; and its purpose is to reorient our attention away from our social and economic 'place', and towards our existential 'ground'. In part two some scientific and social-scientific evidence helped illuminate why 'beliefs' are not what we typically assume, why the sacred won't go away, why the spiritual injunction to 'wake up' matters, why the experience of meaning is visceral, why our need for perspective and balance is greater than ever, and why we need take spiritual practise seriously. And in part three it was argued that the concerns of our human ground should be explored through revitalised public discussions with respect to love, death, self and soul.

With all that in mind, what then is the place of the spiritual in the public realm?

In the course of this project, we have tried to answer this question several times in a range of blog posts. We initially made a case for spirituality as the key bridge between personal and social transformation, arguing that we need spiritual practices, perspectives and experiences to help us in our "lifelong challenge to embody our vision of human existence and purpose" because human immunity to change is otherwise too strong.[227]

We also argued that we need spirituality to deepen our understanding of the public wellbeing debate by placing greater emphasis on meaning and growth, rather than

pleasure; and the political adoption of behaviour change, by challenging convention-al wisdom about unchangeable human traits, particularly relating to our automatic natures. We also drew attention to the role of the spiritual in existing practice within education, social work, nursing and psychiatry.[228]

More recently, in the context of global inequality and acute ecological problems, combined with a rise in mental health problems and lonliness, we argued the public role of the spiritual was to help us to imagine a society with a better balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.[229]

And in our work on climate change last year, the spiritual was implicit in the call to get over what we call 'stealth denial' – knowing while acting as if one didn't know - and 'wake up', even if that means some kind of ritual process in which we grieve for our lost habitat, an idea suggested by various others who sense that the climate crisis has spiritual roots, including Philosopher Clive Hamilton and the Guardian's Jo Confino.[230]

While all of that, and more, helps make the utilitarian case for spirituality, the real value of the spiritual may be even deeper.

Some have argued that spirituality and utility are like oil and water – they are not supposed to mix. For instance, in his commencement address at Stanford, Zen Priest Norman Fischer was adamant that spiritual practice must be "Useless, absolutely use-less":

"You've been doing lots of good things for lots of good reasons for a long time now," he said, "for your physical health, your psychological health, your emotional health, for your family life, for your future success, for your economic life, for your community, for your world. But a spiritual practice is useless. It doesn't address any of those concerns. It's a practice that we do to touch our lives beyond all concerns – to reach beyond our lives to their source."[231]

This sentiment is echoed by Iain McGilchrist, partly in his talk on the soul at the RSA, but also in an earlier workshop. Just as we don't ask of people "What's he/she for?" Nor should we approach spirituality in the spirit of its use value.

On this account, the very nature of spirituality is antithetical to policy because it is not utilitarian, and calls the whole utilitarian philosophy that underpins most policy into question.

In the final RSA workshop, Oliver Robinson drew attention to a helpful distinction of Evelyn Underhill to resolve this tension. Spirituality has both mystical aims (i.e., spirituality as end in itself) and instrumental aims (i.e., spirituality as means of attaining other goals). As an analogy, Oliver mentioned Art and Design as complementary features of a similar perspective, with one emphasising intrinsic value, and the other more extrinsic applica-

tion; but no sense of them being in fundamental conflict.

With all this in mind, it would be completely counter-productive to help ourselves to a particular notion of the spiritual to serve as an axiom to further political ends. Instead it seems most fitting then to make some suggestions that are about restoring a sense of balance between 'ground' and 'place', between spiritual and material, between extrinsic and intrinsic, to show them as fundamentally integrated aspects of our lives and purposes.

The ten points that follow should therefore be read as calls to action, but not of the conventional injunctive 'do this!' variety. In each case the suggestion is that most issues in the public realm have spiritual roots that we need to acknowledge, engage with, and 'bring to the table' when our personal and professional roles oblige us to think more instrumentally. In this respect, they are suggested reference points in response to Martin Luther King's claim that we need to bring love and power together in practice. The potential prize is what Roberto Unger "A larger life" for every man and woman.[232]

From political power to personal power and back again

"There was an uneasy calm about the post-millennial world - shattered by 9/11. Then we were talking about the 'Clash of Civilisations' rather than 'The End of History'. Strangely, despite apocalyptic predictions, two failed wars and a loss of life on a terrifying scale, 9/11 seems to mark a diversion rather than a fundamental change. There is actually something bigger that is going on. Then came the crash. At the time, we were worried about man-made climate change. Suddenly, we were worried about our entire economic structure. We no longer feel able to control our destiny. Complex systems – economic, cultural and environmental – surround us. Yet we have lost a sense of agency. There is a reason for that. We have." – Anthony Painter[233]

Our idea of power is in flux. Moses Naim speaks of 'the end of power', arguing that because of technological developments, globalization and shifts in mentalities, power is now "easier to get, harder to use and easier to lose". [234] Benjamin Barber argues that national governments are now "too big for the small problems and too small for the big problems."[235] After a range of failures and partial successes, NGOs are losing faith in the power of multi-national institutions like the UN to solve international problems, not least on the slow-burning planetary emergency that is climate change. While we may never have loved politicians, the 2012 annual Edelman Trust Barometer survey found that the proportion of people inclined to trust government in 18 countries had fallen to a new low of just 38 percent.[236]

So traditional hierarchical power is less potent and less credible, but it doesn't follow that power is becoming more evenly distributed. The rallying cry "We are the 99%"

may have been rhetorical rather than empirically motivated, but it was based on a well-justified perception that financial power is far too concentrated, and in a way that threatens democracy. And the technological roots of this inequality are in danger of becoming entrenched. Jaron Lanier argues that the financial value of data for advertisers and the lack of effective micropayment mechanisms online means that money, information and power are increasingly the same thing; and they are mostly flowing from unremunerated individuals to major companies like Facebook, Amazon, Twitter and Google.[237]

Since traditional forms of power are failing to deliver, we appear to need a richer experiential grasp of personal and collective power to address major social and ecological problems, especially those that are broadly 'wicked' in nature – including how to keep global average temperatures within a 'safe' range, how to safeguard public health against a range of related threats to it, how to navigate rapid technological change, and how to reduce global wealth inequality.[238]

Such problems, and many more, often call for levels of global awareness, analytical insight, perspective taking and value fluency that few possess, and we need to grow into such qualities, individually and collectively. Speaking at the Davos forum in 2006, for instance, Bill Clinton referenced Ken Wilber and remarked that we need a 'higher level of consciousness' to solve interrelated planetary problems.[239]

The role and relevance of political power has therefore never been more confusing, while the need to get in touch with an inner sense of personal power and development has arguably never been greater. Spirituality points to the possibility of acquiring such 'levels of consciousness' through various forms of spiritual practice and commitment. Indeed, far from being a niche escape from the world, spiritual commitment of this kind – to grow in mental complexity - seems to be a cultural imperative for surviving in the 21st century.[240]

But we cannot do it alone. Indeed personal power is inextricably linked to our capacity to develop ourselves through common endeavour with others. Andrew Samuels puts it like this:

Being actively engaged in a social, political, cultural or ethical issue, together with others, initiates the spiritual. This is a very different perspective from one that would see social spirituality as being something done in the social domain by spiritual people. To the contrary, there is a kind of spiritual rain that can descend on people who get involved in politics and social issues with others.

Relatedly, Matthew Taylor speaks of a shift in perspective from citizens as being the passive recipients of social change through policy, to becoming the active shapers of it through mobilisation.

"The point is not that we don't need policy, nor that it isn't better to have good policies than bad ones, but that we need to think of policy as fuel for a strategy of social renewal, not the engine of that renewal."[241]

So let's think about the engine. 'Policy' might sound a million miles from the spiritual, but if policy is less about Governments doing things, and more about them enabling us to do things; if it's about the social productivity and civic engagement that most complex policy problems now call for, and if that comes back to our sense of personal power which is driven by ideals and feelings and vision, and the sense of being part of something bigger than ourselves; then people will 'get involved' for reasons that are correctly thought of be spiritual. For instance, when we find that mindfulness practice changes our attitudes and behaviours that are beneficial to the environment, that is now a 'policy' development.[242, 243]

From utility to virtue and back again

Most of the Western world has gradually reduced the role of religion on our political economy for good reasons that were partly about loss of presumed religious 'faith' in the population but mostly about the abuse of power outside of democratic control. However, the collateral damage was to remove the spiritual aspects of religion that are an important countervailing force for humanity in the context of capitalism. The fact that we are losing touch with sources of intrinsic value (meaning, community, transcendence, the sacred) is a large part of why, as Michael Sandel says, we are no longer a society with a market ('social democracy') but more like a market society ('neoliberalism'). Reconceiving the spiritual is about trying to deal with that corrosive loss of perspective, and points towards some of the following attempts to rebalance society.[244]

In Rowan Williams's review of Sandel's book What Money Can't Buy, he pinpoints the premise of Sandel's critique into excessive marketisation and points towards forms of resistence as follows: "The fundamental model being assumed here is one in which a set of unconditioned wills negotiate control of a passive storehouse of commodities, each of them capable of being reduced to a dematerialised calculus of exchange value. If anything could be called a "world-denying" philosophy, this is it…a possible world of absolute commodification. If we want to resist this intelligently, we need doctrine, ritual and narrative: sketches of the normative, practices that are not just functions, and stories of lives that communicate a sense of what being at home in the environment looks like—and the costs of failure as well."[245]

Similarly, in the context of 'political emotions' Martha Nausbaum writes that "Public culture needs something religion-like … something passionate and idealistic if human emotions are to sustain projects aimed at lofty goals… Mere respect is not enough to hold citizens together when they must make sacrifices of self-interest."[246] In their book

How Much is Enough?, Robert and Edward Skidelsky present a detailed description of the good life and a rationale for its various elements as an alternative vision to modern capitalism, but in the penultimate paragraph of their book, without forewarning they write: "Could a society entirely devoid of the religious impulse stir itself to pursuit of the common good? We doubt it."[247]

While it is not clear exactly what is meant by 'the religious impulse', emerging empirical evidence from the fields of psychology and neuroscience provide support for the role of spiritual practices, such as mindfulness meditation, as tools for "inner shaping" and the cultivation of several prosocial qualities that may be required for actively caring about the good life e.g., compassion[248],[249], empathy[250], altruism[251], and inner peace[252].

Common to all such perspectives is the idea that to challenge utilitarianism as the default mode of thinking requires a deeper connection with our own spiritual roots, whether within existing institutions or through the process of creating new ones. It doesn't follow of course, that we cease to value utility, but just that we retain a broader and richer perspective of the collateral damage caused by seeking it without it being contained within a larger perspective on ultimate ends.

From economic objectives to existential threats and back again

Just as 'terror management theory' helps to explain why we don't face up to death, there are existential threats to humanity as a whole that might transform the way we live if only we looked at them more directly. Existential threats include sudden developments like asteroid strikes, biological warfare and abrupt and uncontrollable advances in artificial intelligence[253], but the most tangible existential threat is a slow burning one – climate change.

Viewing climate change as an existential threat rather than a technocratic challenge requires the kind of spiritual disposition we considered earlier, namely an openness to experience and a willingness to turn our lives around if necessary. Meyers puts it as follows:

"Because the normative implications of climate change challenge our most basic background assumptions, we cannot simply treat this deeply systemic issue as a problem to be handled consciously and deliberately, if only people had sufficient knowledge and will-power. Unlike broken hammers and cars, we don't simply become conscious of existential problems affecting the lifeworld in order to fix them. Instead, as Heidegger explains, we become insecure and anxious—often without knowing why or even noticing."[254]

Part of the shift from 'place' to 'ground', and from life to death is to wake up to

the broader features of our ecological ground that are under threat. Or as Elizabeth Oldfield put it in a recent 'Thought for the Day', we need to learn to love our shared habitat as if it were a cherished home, and until we realise that it really is something we love that is under threat, our response is unlikely to be fit for the task.[255]

This kind of fundamental shift doesn't mean you stop thinking about the economy, but just as a terminal illness can radically change your perspective on how you want to live, climate change should lead to a shift in perspective in the kind of economic system we need to have.[256] There is some evidence this is beginning to happen, with a variety of models of 'green growth' proposed. However, the core challenge to an economic paradigm based on what Naomi Klein calls 'extractivism' remains, and many have argued that the brutal logic of climate science – particularly relating to time sensitivity- requires a rethinking of basic features of capitalism, including the driving economic objective of most governments around the world – economic growth.[257]

It is precisely because this tension between economic objectives and existential threats is so profound and intractable that we may need deeper perspectives and practices arising from the spiritual to resolve or transcend it.[258]

From surface to depth, and back again

In a culture often thought to be shallow, awash with celebrity gossip, status updates and formulaic scandals; and in a policy landscape awash with 'wicked problems' like global wealth inequality and climate change, this need and appetite for depth of experience and insight is palpable. This need has historically been sidestepped by governments and deferred to religions, but at a time of disengagement with organised religion, political alienation and democratic stress, it is no surprise that politicians and public alike are seeking to reconnect with forgotten spiritual roots. During her RSA talk, Claire Foster-Gilbert, Director of the Westminster Abbey Institute, described Parliament Square as being like "a brittle sponge that is so desperate for water… it's obvious in the people, the institutions, it's in the air, this huge longing for depth."[259]

But we struggle to 'do' depth in public. Isaiah Berlin helps indicate why:

"The notion of depth…is one of the most important categories we use. Although I attempt to describe what profundity consists in, as soon as I speak, it becomes quite clear that no matter how long I speak, new chasms open. No matter what I say, I always have to leave three dots at the end. I am forced to use language which is, in principle, not only today, but forever, inadequate for its purpose."[260]

Given this 'three dots problem', combined with media formats that tend to give little bandwidth and encourage snappy messaging, it's no surprise depth struggles to

find a place in public language. Part of the solution is to acknowledge publicly that we need 'go deep' more often in many spheres of life and policy, but also that we don't need to stay there.

In this respect, Gay Watson spoke in the fourth RSA workshop of one of the main teaching stories designed to capture the spiritual journey of Zen Buddhism. The series of Ox herding pictures represent our struggle to tame and guide the ego – a deep and protracted struggle- but, crucially, the final stage of the journey is about "Coming back to the market with open arms." i.e. it's about what we do for others with the depth we gain from spirituality, rather than viewing the journey towards depth as way to escape the surface demands of our lives.[261]

From life to death, and back again

On balance, our lives would be richer if we would find ways to increase the cultural salience of death as an aspect of life, not merely as its ending. In this regard, Will Self suggests that just as Physicists came to understand that the dimensions of space and time were effectively the same thing, so we might benefit from thinking in terms of 'lifedeath'. While the term may not catch, evidence detailed above suggests a sustained reflection on death can reorient our lives in helpful ways, as long as we 'do death' in a way that prompts reflection and reorientation, not defensive evasion and entrenchment.

In this respect, we should consider what it would mean to 'do death' outside of religious contexts, whether we should, and what that might look like at scale. A good question for any such institutional form – in schools, businesses and governments - might be: how does the fact that we will die at an unknown time influence our judgment about what is most worth learning? How does our failure to acknowledge our deaths inform our inability to fully face up to other threats that have existential aspects, including climate change? If the evidence from 'post-traumatic growth' and 'near death experiences' points towards a complete orientation in what we value and prioritise, is there not, staying mindful of ethical concerns, a strong case for simulating the experience of dying in certain contexts?

From self to soul, and back again

When we think of how we tweak our social media profiles and other online profiles, how we update our CVs and how we present ourselves at parties, meetings and so forth, it's clear that our culture actively encourages people to create their own personal 'brand image', and once this story is cast, it can become locked-in and self-perpetuating, requiring strenuous and ongoing identity maintenance.

The idea of the soul helps to put the existing cultural emphasis on the self into perspective and we should imagine what a society that placed relatively more emphasis on the soul, and relatively less on the self might look like. One implication might be a greater emphasis on the central human importance of creativity – not 'innovation' driven by profit motive, but creativity as a fundamentally humanising experience, as expressed by Carl Rogers:

"The mainspring of creativity appears to be the same tendency which we discover so deeply as the curative force in psychotherapy-man's tendency to actualize himself, to become his potentialities. By this I mean the directional trend which is evident in all organic and human life-the urge to expand, extend, develop, mature-the tendency to express and activate all the capacities of the organism, to the extent that such activation enhances the organism or the self."[262]

One corollary might be to challenge our emphasis on the work ethic, with what Pat Kane calls 'the play ethic', and taking ideas like significantly shorter working weeks very seriously as a shared human goal to reduce the pressure to remain in the performative stresses of the self, and increase the time we have to cultivate our souls.[263]

From political freedom to psychological freedom and back again

The language of freedom abounds in political arguments, but we would benefit from extending the idea of freedom beyond the legal and political realms, into the psychological and existential realms. Stephen Batchelor puts it like this: "In theory, freedom may be held in high regard; in practice it is experienced as a dizzying loss of meaning and direction."[264]

While we are fortunate to live with a high degree of political and economic freedom, most people are trapped in various ways. The point of spirituality is often to present pathways out of these more subtle traps of identity, financial pressure and family responsibility that are not necessarily about changing our roles, but radically changing our perspective on them. For instance, Kegan's theory of adult development can be thought of as a theory of freedom. His model of development is presented as becoming increasingly able to take as 'object' aspects of our experience that we were previously subject to; we gradually stop being defined by things, and find our own power to define them in our own ways.

In this respect, personal development is about more than ego enhancement. There are ways to grow psychologically and spiritually, and organizational theory is beginning to take this seriously. For instance, Frederic Laloux's recent book, 'reinventing organisations' was praised by Ken Wilber, and places human development and 'levels of consciousness' at the heart of organizational vision and mission.[265]

From happiness to meaning and back again

Many of us are on what Jonathan Haidt calls 'the hedonic treadmill' – stuck in a life that is about patterns of pleasure seeking, satisfaction and renewed desire, often linked to patterns of consumption.[266] Foregoing hedonic activities to pursue more meaningful ones may result in greater wellbeing.[267] The pursuit of meaning over happiness has also been associated with better health outcomes. The point is not that wellbeing doesn't matter, but that wellbeing should include hedonic and eudaemonic aspects, and that eudaemonic wellbeing is closer to the spiritual than is hedonic pleasure seeking.

It is notable that the New Economic Foundation's celebrated 'five a day for your mind' includes paying attention, connecting with people, giving, and learning, as well as being active – none of which are pleasure-seeking activities as such.[268] The role of spirituality in the wellbeing debate is therefore to help frame the societal objective of increased wellbeing as being more than a utilitarian calculus of pleasures entertained divided by pleasures satisfied, and more about our cultural capability to relate, pay attention, find meaning and experience depth, even when such things do not make us 'happy' as such.

From extrinsic motivation to intrinsic motivation and back again

The public realm faces significant challenges that cannot be adequately addressed by instrumental, utilitarian thinking. By public realm I mean the political economy and all the educational, commercial, civic and media institutions related to it; all of which, of course, have human beings inside them.

RSA fellow Ian Christie puts the point as follows:

"We have had two centuries of a civilisation of unparalleled material progress, abundance and development based on extrinsic values (self-interest, materialism, economic growth, keeping up, social mobility); intrinsic 'beyond-self' and religious values have periodically been reasserted but they have lost their institutional hold and centrality to the stories that make sense of our lives. The extrinsic values celebrated by industrial society are now under real pressure in the West as scarcities begin to return and confidence in the future wanes, for good reasons of ecological disruption, social fragmentation and economic dysfunction and inequality."[269]

The most explicit expression of a need for new thinking that is less instrumental and extrinsic came from Common Cause[270] and subsequent related publications and institutions, including The Public Interest Research Centre[271] and The New Citizenship Project[272], but such influences remain relatively fringe. We cannot and should not eliminate extrinsic motivation entirely, but the language of spirituality has an important role in

showing its limitations, and giving an authentic vantage point for intrinsic values that otherwise risk being diluted by being translated into instrumental language.

From beliefs to institutions and back again

What is driving the growth in the 'spiritual but not religious' identification is as much to do with a distaste for institutions as it is a loss of particular beliefs. The binding qualities of institutions are viewed as problematic in an increasingly individualistic culture and the 'beliefs' fall out of that, rather than the other way round. However, at the same time we crave the kinds of community and solidarity that emerges from shared values and enduring commitments, and organised religion is still pre-eminent in meeting that need.

Claire Foster-Gilbert puts it simply: "What I really want to say is… don't give up on the old religions. We need them, we need their story, we need their history, we need all the mistakes that they've made over the millennia. All the recognitions of the dangers of spirituality, my god is it dangerous spirituality, once let loose… It's all there, it's all there! And we need to go back to it with this new understanding."

As The Sunday Assembly movement transitions from a vibrant city movement to a complex international organization, these questions of coherence, commitment and clarifying exactly what binds together in the long term will become important. Many members do not consider themselves Atheists, and some do not even think of themselves as 'Godless', which raises questions about whether the attraction is entertainment or meaning. Initial signs show a huge hunger for the congregational experience, currently based on a shared aspiration to 'live better, help often, wonder more', but time will tell if they can maintain high levels of participation and commitment in Chris Harding's terms:

"Commitment perhaps turns on just the right balance of shared interests or growing inter-personal commitment, and sufficient space for exploration and growth within the group."

This point chimes with Iain McGilchrist's arguments about needing to rebalance what we believe and how we believe it – in favour of the latter. This broader emphasis on our engagement with institutions, including our ability to create and shape them, reflects an existing tradition in spirituality that emphasizes the relative transformative power of 'how' over 'what'. We shouldn't feel our only options are to go back to religion as it is, or cut spirituality off from institutional support altogether. There are many creative possibilities in between, both in terms of renewal and reimagining and it feels like we have barely started.[273]

The question of how we cater for new conceptions of spiritual need and aspiration

socially and politically is best answered through practice rather than theory, and it will become clearer over the ensuing years and decades. In this respect, Franciscan priest and spiritual writer Richard Rohr encapsulates one of the main underlying arguments of this book as a whole:

'We do not think ourselves into new ways of living, we live ourselves into new ways of thinking'.[274]

Part Five

Towards a new social imaginary

"There is too little intellect in matters of the soul."
-Pankaj Mishra

In part four we began to draw out some links between features of life that are broadly spiritual – about meaning and nature and purpose and value; and features of society that are broadly political – about power and resources and structures and systems. In most cases the spiritual and the political do not meet each other in cause and effect relationships, but more like setting and plot relationships; the active ingredients in question are potent, but usually manifest in subtle forms of context and association and influence. Making sense of what follows from Spiritualise is therefore not so much an analytical puzzle but more like an ongoing institutional and cultural challenge. This final part of the book therefore introduces my new organisation, Perspectiva. We seek to influence a necessary cultural change process through our intellectual commitment to reimagining the ontological and epistemological foundations of society and the operating principles of our political economy.

Perspectiva seeks to work at the level of the heart, the mind and the soul, but we cannot afford to feel alienated from capital, technology, political power, policy detail, and competition. That means we have to try to think and feel and act at a high level of abstraction, without losing sight of details or intuitions. We use the term 'imaginaries' to capture this level of analysis, which Philosopher Charles Taylor calls 'a wider grasp of our whole predicament'. To make sense of our current imaginary, I introduce the crisis we have to contend with, the ideological context of that crisis and the meta crisis that lies within it.

To understand how we might shift the social imaginary, or construct a new one, I introduce some conceptual tools that amount to a form of applied spiritual sensibility. I begin with the contemporary relevance of the old Germanic idea of *Bildung* which is

about forms of meaningful personal growth that arise in response to our social predicament. I argue that this idea has strong philosophical roots in the relationship between the subjective and objective features of reality, and that this 'reality relationship' also offers a good vantage point to consider perennial spiritual questions, for instance about the existence of God. However, since value pluralism and plural rationalities are a feature and not a bug of society, any vision of human development will manifest in different ways across policy contexts, depending on the emphasis on, for instance, planning, solidarity, enterprise or fatalism. It is suggested that making this kind of cultural shift requires a new conceptual framework of working across 'systems, souls and society' and a renewed appreciation for the transformative power of small groups functioning on the basis of benign disinterest. – what I call 'tribes beyond tribalism'. I end by introducing eight questions worth living for.

Introducing Perspectiva

In the spring of 1998 I overheard a delicious fragment of conversation that has stayed with me ever since. I was a second-year undergraduate at Keble College in Oxford, loitering without intent near the porter's lodge. Three students were sitting on a bench nearby, overlooking the quad, saturated by their discussion. They were shuffling around, preparing to leave. Matt, I think he was called, spoke as if to summarise: "Well, you have to get things in perspective". His two female friends turned to him, bemused. "In what respect?!", said one of them. "Oh, just generally", he said.

You have to get things in perspective. Just generally. And that's much harder and more important and more consequential than it sounds. The spiritual dimension of human existence is arguably no more or less than the lifelong challenge to get things in perspective.

As Sociologist Riina Raudne points out however, we need perspective on perspective too. For instance, the educational assessment tool Lectica builds on a body of research about how understanding of decision-making develops and points to the idea that the more of the system you see, the more different perspectives you see. In this respect, the decision, the final perspective, in its wisest form, would be something that has emerged from considering a variety of different explicit and implicit perspectives in an appropriately weighted way, against the criteria of the desired outcome, and then the decision, or the meta-perspective, would ideally be the product of coordinated perspectives. That kind of perspective is rare but valuable and we need it to move beyond the idea that everything is 'merely' a matter of perspective because many features of life are not perspectival – like laws of nature – and because living means making decisions. Perhaps a simpler way to make the same point then is as John Carroll does in his critique of humanism, The Wreck of Western Culture: "It is all a question of a place

to stand. Nothing else really matters." In either case, at a time of information overload and technological saturation, it is surprisingly difficult to stand up for the importance of getting things in perspective, and deeply political too, because it demands time and resources and may well lead to subversive outcomes.

I feel blessed to have had the chance to lead the two-year long project at the RSA, culminating in the first edition of Spiritualise. The project was literally life changing because it created a community of interest and practise, but also because it clarified my professional purpose. My applied research as Director of the Social Brain Centre at the RSA covered a wide range of policy areas, including education, banking, policing, ageing, child protection, energy and mental health – in all cases I noticed there were spiritual dimensions to these issues that I was keen to explore. Another way to put that is that the question: what's really going on here? always seemed to lie outside the project brief, budget and timescale.

The first exception was my attempt to understand Iain McGilchrist's monumental work The Master and his Emissary about how hemispheric lateralisation in the brain plays out in cultural history. Iain's profound but subtle and intricate perspective is considered in part two in the context of getting one's life in perspective and balance, but the implications are potentially much deeper. The value of the right hemisphere's perspective (not what it does, but what it is like) is quite similar to the value of spiritual sensibility in many ways. However, in the inquiry published as Divided Brain, Divided World? I couldn't establish cause and consequence relationships and I struggled to get a more specific injunction than that we needed 'deep cultural change'. This was a useful learning experience however and helped me understand that it is a mistake to instrumentalise perspectives that are valuable precisely because they critique or attenuate instrumentality.[275]

It became easier to consider the big picture when I was working on perhaps the world's most wicked and exacting challenge - climate change.[276] At first blush cultivating spiritual sensibility and dealing with climate change are two very different issues, but I am one of many who see them as part of the same challenge. How can we imagine and create a desirable future?[277]

As the RSA's strategic emphasis shifted and tightened, I knew my own focus had to be on a sustained inquiry into the relationship between our inner and outer worlds, combining the personal and the political in the broadest and deepest and best sense of both terms.

Around then, in the summer of 2015, I met Swedish social theorist and entrepreneur Tomas Björkman, author of The Market Myth (2016) and The World We Create (2017). Tomas is a member of the international think tank, The Club of Rome, and had read my RSA reports, including Spiritualise. Both of us were beginning to connect the cultural

failure to speak of spiritual matters with the fact that 'systems change' seemed so maddeningly elusive. Fashionable references to wellbeing, cultural identity and behaviour change are encouraging, but there is clearly a pervasive wariness of going further, and an uneasy, immature and allergic relationship with anything that might sound even notionally religious. In the desire to appear rigorous and serious and objective, we feel social change organisations wrongly forgo matters of ultimate meaning and purpose, at great loss to society. In an effort to change that, in early 2016 we co-founded Perspectiva.

'Perspectiva' is registered in England and Wales as Perspectives on Systems, Souls and Society "To advance the education of the public in general (particularly amongst thought leaders in the public realm, including writers and academics) on the subject of the relationships between complex global challenges and the inner lives of human beings, and how these relationships play out in society; and to promote research, activities and discourse for the public benefit in these subjects and to publish useful results."

At the time of writing Perspectiva is based at 42 Acres in Shoreditch, London, and part an emerging European and Global network with similar values and aims. We exist to put the world's most complex challenges in perspective in the broadest and deepest sense. We hope our enduring organisational commitment to applied philosophy will generate shared conceptual resources, animating stories and common experiences and purposes for those who see the need to bring our inner and outer worlds together. We start here by making the case for why this is necessary and timely work.

Did Somebody say Crisis?

We need to get the idea of crisis in perspective. In Utopia for Realists Rutger Bregman suggests the main history lesson we should learn is that "everything in the past was worse".[278] That seems much too crude a claim, but it's an important corrective to seeing prevailing problems as a sign that everything is fundamentally wrong. Global poverty might soon be ended, the world has perhaps never been less violent and most of us live longer and healthier lives than before. Many say we've never had it so good, and that might well be true. However, it doesn't follow that we are going in the right direction. What appeared to 'work' in conventional terms for the problem of scarcity and development may not work for the challenge of continuity or survival.[279] Paul Mason encapsulates this distinction well by saying that capitalism is a complex adaptive system that has lost its capacity to adapt.[280] And in The Strange Death of Europe by Douglas Murray, the title of chapter sixteen is particularly evocative: "The feeling that the story has run out."

Building a coherent world for billions of human beings and other sentient creatures was never going to be easy. In the early 21st century, after considerable economic

and technological progress and emancipatory gains throughout the world, we see the following cracks appearing in civilization, all of which occur at different time scales, but most of which cannot be papered over:

- **Pending Ecological Collapse.** We have transgressed a range of ecological boundaries.[281] Climate change mitigation alone, which former UK Climate Policy Diplomat John Ashton calls "a multiplier in a nexus of systemic risk" requires a literally incredible transformation – in the sense that it is very hard to believe we can do it.[282]

- **Recurring Economic Instability.** The global economic and financial system seems chronically vulnerable to shocks. We do not seem to be learning lessons from recent crashes.[283]

- **Rising wealth and income inequality within countries.** Economic Inequality between countries is generally falling, but within both developed and developing countries it is rising rapidly. Globally, wealth inequality within countries has risen steadily since the 1970s and wealth and income inequality within countries is projected to rise.[284]

- **Widespread Social Fragmentation.** Pervasive loneliness and deteriorating mental health are increasingly the norm in developed countries.[285]

- **Hostility to open societies.** Opposition to immigration is widespread and many countries are moving towards authoritarian populism and economic nationalism.[286]

- **Acute Democratic Stress.** Levels of trust in Politicians and political institutions are increasingly low.[287] There are signs of 'democratic deconsolidation' - the numbers who believe it is not 'essential' to live in a democracy are high and rising, especially among younger generations.[288]

- **Cultural Narrowing and Loss of Epistemic Shame.** Social Media tends to reinforce biases and tribalism rather than challenging them – this is a design feature of the internet which is not easy to change.[289] Truth feels increasingly devalued, misinformation is often wilfully spread, and people in public life are brazenly lying without direct consequences.[290]

- **Obesogenic Cultures.** Relatively sedentary jobs and the active promotion of unhealthy food make it hard to avoid weight gain. Current projections suggest half the worlds population will be clinically obese by 2030.[291]

- **Stealthy Data Imperialism.** We live in a time of surveillance capitalism. Personal data is highly concentrated and mostly used for commercial gain. This is what

Frank Pasquale calls "A black box society" in which decisions about us are made without us knowing the basis on which they were made.[292]

- **Enervation of human rights.** Political, civil, social, economic and cultural rights are not always seen as a universal provision to ensure human dignity, but more like a ruse for illegitimate 'others' to make moral claims against the state.[293]

- **Biodiversity Loss.** The WWF estimates that the earth has lost over half of its wildlife in the last 40 years.[294] There are also widespread extinctions and direct links between biodiversity and the availability of clean air, good water and available fuel and food.

- **Industrial cruelty to animals.** We kill about 56 billion animals (and 1-3 trillion fish) every year for food, mostly following lives in conditions akin to torture. As Jeremy Bentham put it: "The question is not: can they reason? Can they talk? But, can they suffer?" And the answer is a resolute yes. [295]

- **Runaway Technological Disruption.** Robotics, synthetic biology, virtual reality, blockchain technologies, 'superintelligence', 3D printing and many more developments help solve certain problems and create opportunities, but their collective impact is to destabilise our more basic social and cultural foundations. AI in particular is likely to lead to significant changes in the nature and amount of employment available for current and future generations.[296]

- **Random Terrorist Threats.** It is difficult to feel fundamentally safe, especially in major cities.[297]

Some of these issues are urgent existential threats. Others are consistent with the perennial human challenge to adapt. Many are not mentioned here (eg child slavery, gender and race inequality, pervasive dissatisfaction at work). Some challenges will come to a head quickly, some are more gradual and many are as yet unknown. All pose the question: is there now an unbridgeable gap between our technical ingenuity and our capacities for cooperative and anticipatory governance.[298]

Taken together, can we really say there is a crisis? Can't we 'make do and mend'? Perhaps a little population reduction here, some economic growth there, some shifts of moral emphasis and a few technological breakthroughs everywhere?

The idea that there is a crisis is not a general call to arms, but something quite specific – the recognition of the timeliness of intentional action in the context of paradigmatic change that will either happen to us, or through us. The etymology of the term crisis is about decisive moments in times of difficulty, and originated in the need to reverse the course of a disease before it was too late. In that sense, we definitely face a crisis. And that crisis has an ideological context.

Crisis in context

"Ideology is strong exactly because it is no longer experienced as ideology… we feel free because we lack the very language to articulate our unfreedom."
— Slavoj Žižek, In Defense of Lost Causes

In Maps of Meaning Social Psychologist Jordan Peterson develops an extensive and intricate argument to highlight the cultural loss of connection between our inner and outer lives that keeps us cut off from reality and unable to act with conviction. In a more recent lecture he distilled the point as follows:

"Artists and mystics are mediators between the absolute unknown and things we know for sure…What we know is established on a form of knowledge that we don't really understand. And if those two things are out of synch – if our articulated knowledge becomes out of synch from our dream then we become dissociated internally. And we think things we don't act out. And we act out things we don't dream. And that produces a kind of sickness of the spirit. And that sickness of the spirit – its cure is something like an integrated system of belief and representation. And people turn to ideologies - which I regard as a parasite on an underlying religious substructure – to try to organise their thinking, and that's a catastrophe. And that's what Nietzsche foresaw. He knew that when we knocked the slats out of the base of Western Civilisation by destroying this representation – this God ideal let's say – we would move back and forth violently between nihilism and the extremes of ideology."[299]

Is that not roughly where we seem to be? Moving back and forth between nihilism and ideologies that are always partial and ultimately destructive? At least some familiarity with our current ideological context is necessary for understanding the crisis and the place of spiritual sensibility in responding to that crisis, if only to stop the moving back and forth.

At one point, it may have seemed like the oscillation was slowing down, but the harmonious open society vision of a peaceful convergence of states with shared democratic norms, free and fair markets and vibrant civil societies; where we all pursue our own conception of the good without getting in each-others' way seems a far cry from the world we live in – and now looks naïve. What we have is more like a confusing range of ideologies vying to become hegemonic while subtly reinforcing each other. [300]

Any map is imperfect, and we could include, for instance, Socialism, Confucianism, Postmodernism, Conservatism, Environmentalism and Islamo-Facism, but in the early 21st century there appears to be an uneasy coexistence of three main forms of ideological power: neoliberalism (financial and economic power) neonationalism (political and military power) and solutionism (technological and cultural power). The combined effect of these forms of power creates what cultural theorist Theodor Adorno calls "the

ontology of false conditions." That sense of false consciousness, of not being able to access the world on our own terms because powerful interests don't want us to is the spiritual and political heart of the matter. Political Scientist Stephen Eric Bronner puts it as follows:

"At stake is the substance of subjectivity and autonomy: the will and ability of the individual to resist external forces intent upon determining the meaning and experience of life."[301]

A detailed discussion of ideology in general or particular ideologies is well beyond our scope here, but invoking ideology and hegemony highlights something essential about the place of the spiritual in the modern world – particularly its role in helping us conceive of the world in ways that are not determined by manifestations of distant heteronomous power.

To suggest that delusion is pervasive is a strong claim, but it is conventional in many schools of psychotherapy and philosophy and is a central premise of world religions. For instance to be in a condition of sin in Christianity is partly about being cut off from reality, the idea of maya in Hinduism is about illusion being a feature of reality rather than a bug, and dukkha in Buddhism stems from delusion, not least the failure to grasp impermanence and interdependence.

Waking up spiritually and politically are therefore deeply related. We need to grasp that the prevailing agents of economic, cultural and political power are not merely in the outer world – they are in your head and heart too. Powerful interest groups are always in the reality-construction business; they operate in a way that shapes our world-views, including our own senses of self, but in ways that typically serve their interests. This point is particularly well expressed in the prizewinning essay on the politics of attention by former Google Employee James Williams and it is clearly a challenge that is compounded by the addictive quality of digital technologies.[302]

There is no single puppet master orchestrating this kind of manipulation, but it happens nonetheless through tacit logics of institutional design and patterns of cultural transmission. Implicit norms of success are conveyed through advertising, implicit norms of identification and allegiance are conveyed in political campaigns, and implicit norms of status and salvation are embedded in handheld gadgets. It is worth saying a little more of each, in turn, [303]

Neoliberalism, defined succinctly by Will Davies as 'the state-led reorganising of society on the model of the market' is still the underlying operating system of the global economy, in which free markets and competition are reified, valorised and spread, and inequality is a design feature. Neoliberalism is built around a view of the rational and heroic individual consumer who knows what he wants and thereby helps give rise to a

society we all want to live in; while it denies the notion of an objective common good that might be pro-actively built together.[304]

Neoliberalism's projected persona manifests as the commercial dignity of the small business owner, but in practice it serves the concentration of data and power and influence of large corporations. Consumerism is the handmaiden of neoliberalism; it is still our cultural modus operandi and despite its ecological impact and the inherent absurdity of living to buy stuff, we often underestimate its social and emotional logics within our current imaginary relating to novelty, identity and status – it endures for a reason.[305]

Neonationalism is partly a response to the economic and social harms caused by neoliberalism (dropping living standards, immigration, alienation) but it is also partly a way of subtly reinforcing corporate power.[306] Neonationalism manifests as an enduring attack on globalisation, democratic norms, freedom of movement and human rights, in which the pre-eminence of national identity is reasserted and strength in general and strong leadership in particular is valorised. The forces of neonationalism are evident in many countries, including the USA, Russia, China, India and Turkey.

Educated liberally minded people often underestimate the appeal of apparently simple solutions and the power of projected 'strength' as a response to pervasive alienation, ressentiment, and anxiety - which rising star of the Labour party Lisa Nandy MP recently described as 'the defining political challenge of our time.'[307] Neonationalism generally overlooks the enduring power of truth, the hard-earned sanity of liberal democracy and the reality of ecological constraints, but it can take decades for such things to act as effective countervailing forces.

Solutionism refers to the combination of techno-utopianism and techno-determinism; it is a mostly libertarian world view with its heartland in Silicon Valley.[308] The worldview assumes that technological innovation and disruption will solve social, economic and ecological problems, and the start-up and the entrepreneur are reified and valorised. It is assumed that somehow we can 'innovate' and 'disrupt' our way out of our worst problems including health problems and ultimately death, which is increasingly viewed not as an existential constraint to confer meaning but as a technical problem to be solved.

The apotheosis of this worldview are solutions based on the application of artificial intelligence, described by Deep Mind CEO Demis Hassabis as 'a meta solution' – "First solve intelligence, and then use it to solve everything else." Improved AI can of course help enormously with discrete problems, but it is less clear it can help with the emergent properties that arise from the interaction between complex systems shaped by reflexive human beings. Moreover, the critical question is: who owns AI and what do they want from it? The darker aspects of this worldview are the concentration of power inherent in

surveillance capitalism, the cult-like true-believer conviction that technology is always a force for good, and the deluded notion that death is merely a technical problem that will soon be solved.[309]

The key point underlying this ideology is, as the technology heretic Jaron Lanier puts it, information, money and power are increasingly the same thing - data is the new oil. Moreover, James Williams convincingly argues that digital technologies directly mine our attention, thereby undermining or will and weakening democracy. Still, we should not underestimate the role of technology in fortifying the cheerleaders of purely technical approaches to problems, which is invariably more attractive than the social, emotional and psychological work of adaptive challenges, even though both arise together in practice.[310]

These three ideologies are by no means exhaustive of all that is happening in the world, and their relationship is more complex than we can attend to here, but they shape the ideological context in which the need to cultivate spiritual sensibility has become more urgent. Each of them tacitly conveys what you should place your trust in, who you are, and what you need to do.

Neoliberalism says: Trust the logic of the market. You are a rational competitor and know your own mind. Those who work hard will always prevail.

Neonationalism says: Trust the strength of your nation state. You are an aggrieved victim and others are to blame. Close ranks and build walls and you'll be safe.

Solutionism says: Trust the power of technology. Even your mortality is a technical problem. Just keep clicking, and we'll give you what you really want.

They are all wrong.

The Meta Crisis

"The world has become so confusing that we are confused about our own confusion." – Nora Bateson

From considering the details of the crisis and the ideological context, I think it is clear that this is a decisive moment in time where we have to stop treating each problem separately and instead acknowledge the deeper crisis that lies behind and within the crisis. It is not easy to take that approach in an intellectual context that is not familiar with that kind of analysis and a political context that does not welcome that kind of challenge, but we have to try. Theologian and Social Critic Rowan Williams puts it like this:

"There are crises and there are meta-crises: a system may stagger from one crisis to another but never recognise the underlying mechanisms that subvert its own logic...If we are now panicking about the triumph of a politics of resentment, fear and unchallengeable untruthfulness, we had better investigate what models of human identity we have been working with. Our prevailing notions of what counts as knowledge, our glib reduction of democracy to market terms, our inability to tackle the question of the limits of growth – all these and more have brought us to the polarised, tribal politics of today and the thinning out of skill, tradition and the sense of rootedness. Treating these issues with intellectual honesty is not a sign of political regression but the exact opposite."[311]

The concept of a meta-crisis is capacious and pertinent and underdeveloped. 'Meta' often means self-referential, but can also mean across, after, beside, about, through, within or beyond. Williams's reference to 'subverting its own logic' makes me think of an oroborous – the mythological snake that eats its own tail; indicative of the way we are currently transgressing our planetary boundaries or 'eating the planet'.

At its most generic, meta-crisis loosely means 'the crisis within the crisis'. The following development of the idea of the meta-crisis is neither exhaustive nor exclusive, and I hope to further develop the idea elsewhere. In brief I think of the meta-crisis as a mixture of epistemic panic, ethical drift, existential confusion and emotional disorientation; at a collective level prevailing thinking about the world lacks depth and perspective, our ways of valuing and conceptions of the good are underdeveloped, and there is no compelling shared vision of meaning and purpose. In that context we struggle to know what to feel about the world as a whole, and often prefer to feel very little at all.

To put that point more substantively, the neoliberal economic order established since the late 1970s is unable to cope with the strains and shocks to its model of capitalism since 2007-8. This crisis of neoliberal governance has provoked the emergence of populist neo-nationalism, as both foe and uneasy ally with neoliberal plutocrats (as in Trump's USA). There are other ideological games in town, but all lack critical mass, intellectual confidence and a narrative of hope and plausible change. All contending ideological camps face challenges that induce panic, disavowal and confusion: the ecological crises of climate disruption and global destruction of species and habitats; the fear of unstoppable technological innovations and the creation of techno-systems on which we will depend (eg geoengineering) and which will destabilise our societies (artificial intelligence and robotics); the question of how fluid and contested group identities can be governed, avoiding violent conflicts and promoting cooperation. The meta-crisis of our time is the inability of current ideologies and governance systems to make sense of these oncoming challenges, and of so many individuals to make sense of their lives, priorities and common cause in the face of the larger paralysis of our cultures.[312]

One result of the meta-crisis is that we do not feel properly rooted in reality and can

barely imagine what it would look and feel like to be so – this is why I began Spiritualise with a Heidegger quotation about the fundamental problem of the Western World and not oblique wisdom from an Eastern mystic. We are struggling to develop the cultural and institutional resources we need for the curriculum of the meta crisis, namely to clarify our confusion, correct our incongruence or share in our searching.

In that context of ambient confusion and delusion there are glimpses of direction and coherence that offer hope. As indicated in the new preface, the challenge is to cultivate spiritual sensibility, which means fashioning the forms of inquiry, practise, encounter and experience that help us get things in perspective in the fullest and broadest and deepest sense. The meta-crisis is about our current unwillingness or inability to do that.

The meta crisis is largely about our collective failure to make features of life that are unconscious, conscious, but it is much more than psychological. Without realising it, we all orient ourselves towards the world emotionally epistemically, ethically and existentially all the time –broadly how we feel, how we know, how we value, and what is meaningful. These major contours of the experience are co-emergent and interrelated and mostly experienced unconsciously and automatically. To appreciate their importance and their relationship we need spiritual sensibility, but at a societal level we need to disaggregate them to figure out a suitably discerning cultural or policy response.

The response to the meta crisis may therefore be a spiritualised politics that is hard to imagine and has not yet taken form. This is not a utopian claim because spiritual sensibility is not really about happiness or positive thinking. Indeed, the conflation of spiritual life and wellbeing that falls out of 'mind, body and spirit' as a book category is unhelpful. Spiritual questions are normative in nature, but there are as much about seeking the good in life as finding it. Spiritual experience is about encountering the real; rather than liberation or ecstasy it can also be felt through shame or sorrow or longing. For instance, CS Lewis famously characterised the spiritual experience of joy as being ""…an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction."[313]

While spiritual matters are not always positive, when understood as a spiritual challenge with emotional, epistemic, ethical and existential aspects, the meta-crisis becomes a surprisingly practical matter. The problem manifests in our inability to hold genuinely searching cultural conversations in a way that translates into building institutional and political commitment to putting things in their fullest and broadest and deepest context.

In practice that could mean many things, but when we wheel out the conventional 'radical' ideas they don't quite ring true. For instance shorter working weeks and a universal citizen dividend (aka 'basic income') could give people the time and inclination to focus on more intrinsically valuable activities, and spiritual practices including medi-

tation could and perhaps should become as mainstream as exercise is now. And, yes, there should be significant investments in humanities, arts and adult education – the prevailing idea that 'STEM' subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) are the most important is troubling because it takes for granted the enduring and exacting question of what they are all ultimately for.

The problem is that in reaching for policy solutions we risk forsaking Einstein's insight about being unable to solve the world's problems with the same thinking that caused them. There is a more fundamental need for cultural and institutional change. Radical policies might help with that indirectly by giving time to reflect on the social imaginary, but in a world of Putin, Goldman Sachs, Google and Facebook, policy successes will always be vulnerable to being co-opted by prevailing patterns of understanding and power.

The point of emphasising spiritual sensibility is that we need to commit to a more wholehearted reorientation of society towards the kinds of cultural transmission and perspective training that lead us to ask complex but fundamental questions like: What is the economy for? What kind of future do we want to build? What is of value and how do we go about valuing it? How should we live our lives? What, if anything, do we owe each other? It is mistake to think we will find ourselves through definitively answering such questions, but without asking them we are truly lost.[314]

Bildung

"I like my English Germanic." – Alexander Bard (Swedish)

As indicated above, there is not one single threat to civilisation, but several together. We need to find a way to respond that is informed not so much by a strategy, but an inclusive vision and a credible and inspiring ethos. The Philosopher Martha Naussbaum puts this point as follows:

"Public culture needs something religion-like … something passionate and idealistic if human emotions are to sustain projects aimed at lofty goals… Mere respect is not enough to hold citizens together when they must make sacrifices of self-interest." [315]

The sacrifice of self-interest is a complex notion, and depends a great deal on your view of the pliability of the self, the value of sacrifice and the cultivation of different kinds of interests or sentiments. The cultivation of spiritual sensibility is relevant because it leads you to rethink the normative foundations of your social, economic, political and cultural life. A particularly cogent case for this kind of transformative approach was recently presented by Jeffrey Sachs in a keynote lecture at the London School of Economics. Sachs offers the familiar critiques of neoclassical economics but also gives

a detailed connection between the design of the economy from first principles and a fairly detailed vision of human development and flourishing (eudaimonia) including the case for development as flourishing.[316]

The key point of emphasis is to link economic success to wellbeing, but not as a utilitarian preference-maximising notion. Rather, wellbeing can and should be thought of as a preference-cultivating notion; on that account wellbeing would have an implicit theory of state and community responsibility for human virtue development built in to it. Two normative claims seem to be axiomatic for such a vision.

First, the state being neutral about 'the good life' is a mistake if you also allow advertising, because that leads to the market shaping rather than merely reflecting preferences. We can instead build a world that has ethical foundations that dare to go beyond letting everybody 'satisfy their preferences' without creeping towards tyranny.[317] What matters is not so much satisfying desires but 'wanting what we want to want' as American Philosopher Harry Frankfurt puts it. Robert and Edward Skidelsky present this kind of case in their 2012 book, How much is Enough? They outline basic goods including health, security, respect, identity, harmony with nature, friendship and leisure and argue that if such basic goods are obtained we can flourish, and don't gain further significant value from additional income. Moreover, it is possible to build social and economic policy around providing such basic goods. Perspectiva does not endorse any particular substantive vision, and believes we may need to shift 'the social imaginary' (see below) to give rise to richer visions that are currently unimaginable. However, we do think that state neutrality about 'the good life' is deeply problematic.

Secondly, humans grow. We need to be kind to ourselves certainly, and relentless self-improvement is a recipe for anxiety, shame and exhaustion. Still, other things being equal, we can and should try to get better morally, intellectually, interpersonally, intra-personally. We don't stop changing in early adulthood. There is a deep sense of meaning and fulfilment in attempting to close the gap between our actions and our ideals. Throughout the lifespan there is a path to find, create and follow, even if development is uneven, and you will often go astray.

To encapsulate the need for such directed activity, consider the following reflection by Professor Thomas Metzinger in his essay Spirituality and Intellectual Honesty on our preeminent and quintessential collective challenge– climate change:

"Conceived of as an intellectual challenge for humankind, the increasing threat arising from self-induced global warming clearly seems to exceed the present cognitive and emotional abilities of our species. This is the first truly global crisis, experienced by all human beings at the same time and in a single media space, and as we watch it unfold, it will also gradually change our image of ourselves, the conception humankind has of itself as a whole. I predict that during the next decades, we will increasingly ex-

perience ourselves as failing beings."

Failing beings? We need to take that possibility on board, yes, not least because it tallies with religious views about human inadequacies, but while I hate facile positive thinking as much as the next person, I'm not ready to give up. Hope, as expressed by thinkers from a wide variety of vantage points, for instance, - Vaclav Havel, Antonio Gramsci, Rebecca Solnit, Rowan Williams – is not about wistful optimism but rather a resolute orientation of the will towards reality, a commitment to take responsibility for whatever we can. In this sense hope lies in looking squarely at Metzinger's premise—"the present cognitive and emotional abilities of our species".

Those abilities of our species are definitely not fixed. John Gray and others may question whether the human species as a whole can grow and change for the better.[318] But a key component of spiritual sensibility is to insist that they can – informed mostly by millennia of spiritual inquiry and practise, but also suggested by modern scientific research on neuroplasticity.[319]

It is crucial to grasp that the emphasis on spiritual growth is not a call for self-help. Our problems are still social and political and economic and ecological, but those systemic and structural issues create a shared challenge that manifests as a need for human beings to adapt.

Part of the challenge is that the idea of spiritual growth is slippery because it is already manifest in myriad ways in the public imagination. To anyone with political awareness, notions of self-cultivation of any kind are viewed with reflex suspicion due to their connections to consumerism and narcissism and their apparent failure to address systemic and structural features of personal challenges.[320]

But the problem is more profoundly that we have so many reference points for what it means to grow that we tend to reach for those that are easiest and most familiar, rather than view the pattern as a whole. There is a similar epistemic challenge to grasping the meta-crisis – in general we want to reduce wholes to parts so that we can get about analysing them, but we need to insist on trying to see the fuller picture.

For instance, most people support the idea of lifelong learning and problem solving, but that can easily collapse into the language of skills and training; the value of unlearning and problem finding required for spiritual growth are not common currency.[321] We valorise change but how often do we speak of our individual and collective immunity to changes that we actually want to make?[322] We value 'growing up' and encourage maturation but don't typically see it as an indefinite and iterative process to be proactively cultivated.[323] Most people recognise that there are aspects of our unconscious that influence how we live, but pervasive references to 'psychobabble' and an inchoate ontology of the unconscious asphyxiate productive dialogues.[324] In developed

countries undergoing psychotherapy is now normal but still slightly stigmatised and by no means encouraged.

Most forms of meditation are familiar and welcome, but mostly as a temporary antidote to stress rather than a lifelong process of discipline and transformation.[325] Prayer is seen in much the same way by many non-religious people - a practice grasped at in times of stress and crisis, but disconnected from a coherent picture of faith, spiritual sensibility and ritual practice. Wisdom is valued but loosely associated with age, and not really connected to a theory of experience or fostered through praxis.[326] Growing in virtue sounds like a worthy goal, but also a bit earnest and vulnerable to facile charges of hypocrisy.[327] The value of having 'a growth mindset' is now part of conventional educational discourse, but it is associated with boosting pupil morale and attainment in institutions, rather than a broader disposition towards life.[328] Emotional intelligence is valued, but the early experiences of attachment and the exacting relational work in adulthood that cultivates it are rarely emphasised.[329]

Self-knowledge and self-awareness and self-esteem are an important part of a culture of striving, but they don't always go deep or far enough for the cultural and structural and problematic bases of that striving to be examined. The ego is typically viewed as a problem to be contained rather than a psychic structure that keeps us from falling apart, and spiritual bypassing is therefore quite common.[330] We all want better relationships, but beyond aspirational references to 'the relational state' what's the collective strategy?[331] The idea of empathy is fashionable, but to give and receive empathy requires significant attention and compassion, and there may also be limits to the value of empathy. [332] Indeed, maybe we need less empathy, and rather more compassion and sympathy, based on a discipline of practising virtues? We venerate willpower, but arguably we are complicit in an attention economy that is designed to undermine it.[333] Wellbeing and Happiness remain lodestars, but our idea of flourishing is underdeveloped[334]

The point is that while the idea of human growth and the value of it are clear enough, it remains somehow nebulous and peripheral because it seems to be too many things to too many people. Many notice the particular features of what it might mean to grow as a human being, but there is no collective consciousness of an overall pattern, or why it might matter in any social or political sense. We need a pattern that connects not only the diverse forms of spiritual growth but also an intelligent approach to connecting them to our systemic and cultural challenges in a way that is meaningful without being crudely instrumental.

Bildung is the operating principle of a society where human growth is viewed not merely as an adaptive imperative to particular challenges, but also a shared endeavour with value for the common good. The concept has philosophical roots in Hegel, Schiller and Von Humboldt and captures several ideas that need to coalesce to make

sense of each other. It is about the patterns of personal change that are driven by the need to change society in particular ways. It is similar to the Gandhian injunction to be the change you want to see in the world and the idea of fulfilment is at its heart. *Bildung* is about the intrinsic value of learning and growing through goals relating to building a better society.

Is *Bildung* spiritual? Mostly yes, with just enough no to prevent allergic reactions. The notion of human growth in question contains several key aspects. It is partly an enriched conception of eudaimonic wellbeing – a map of human flourishing based on growing capability and responsibility (and therefore meaning) throughout the lifespan. It is partly about epistemic acumen, acquiring the requisite cognitive and emotional complexity – 'know how' - to offer more discerning societal diagnoses. And it is partly about deepening empathy, about recognising that meaningful solidarity requires solidarity with people's perspectives – not just to know where people are coming from intellectually, but to experience how it feels to come from that place.[335]

Bildung creates the credible hope that arises from trying to align your actions with your world as you would like it to be, while simultaneously expanding and refining your view of yourself by adapting to the world as it is. In that sense, *Bildung* helps to give structure to the idea that the key to adapting to the meta crisis is spiritual sensibility because it is about how our view of the world and our place in it unfurls. We come to know who we are and what we most value by trying to bring about the world we want to live in.

In their forthcoming book, The Nordic Secret, Tomas Björkman and Lene Andersen argue that *Bildung* lies at the heart of the success and stability of the Nordic countries and they define the term as follows:

"*Bildung* is the way that the individual matures and takes upon him or herself ever bigger personal responsibility towards family, friends, fellow citizens, society, humanity, our globe, and the global heritage of our species, while enjoying ever bigger personal, moral and existential freedoms. It is the enculturation and life-long learning that forces us to grow and change, it is existential and emotional depth, it is life-long interaction and struggles with new knowledge, culture, art, science, new perspectives, new people, and new truths, and it is being an active citizen in adulthood. *Bildung* is a constant process that never ends."

Bildung is not parochial in nature, but as Pankaj Mishra highlights in The Age of Anger, it did grow out of the Germanic emphasis on Kultur as a reaction to some of the alienating aspects of cosmopolitanism, and the cultivation of one's soul was therefore often grounded in national and local traditions:

"Against individual fragmentation and self-maiming, the Romantic ideal of *Bildung*

reaffirmed the value of wholeness, with oneself, others and nature. It was aimed to make the individual feel at home again in this world, instead of seeing it as opposed to himself."[336]

Bildung is therefore neither individualist or collectivist, nor is it either populist or elitist in spirit. To some extent it answers David Goodhart's recent post-liberal arguments for a commitment to particular people and particular places - 'somewhere', but the idea of somewhere can be both grounded and expansive.[337] Moreover, the combination of personal autonomy, social solidarity and enriched perspective makes *Bildung* an appropriate response to spiritual pluralism. *Bildung* does not oblige you to believe or practice in any particular way, but it has religious roots; it explicitly seeks to connect our inner and outer worlds and yet allows scope for everyone to find their own way. The aim is to foster a culture where the inclination to grow spiritually is cultivated and supported, but only minimally directed.

Bildung is about the relationship between self and society, and as indicated there are a range of ideas of what it means to grow in relation to the world around us. In the context of making *Bildung* a new operating principle for society, the strength of under-lying theoretical models matters a great deal. In light of diversity of cultures, values, and epistemologies the grounding phenomenon upon which personal and societal growth is built has to be very solid. We turn to this question now.

The reality relationship

Heidegger's claim that opened the first chapter was that the big problem of the Western world is what "We do not have any clear, common and simple relation to reality and to ourselves." Needless to say, 'the big problem' remains and what follows, though essential, is impossible to answer or even explore definitively here. The challenge is not to find axioms that command universal assent through reason, because history teaches us that axioms are brittle and reason has limitations; neither survives contact with human nature or power struggles very well. Nor is the challenge to insist that diverse perspectives can alight on Love or God or Wisdom or Compassion. Divergence and conflict is baked in to human life.

What we need instead is something scientifically grounded but also true to human eccentricity, unpredictability and reflexivity, and all the emergent properties that arise when humans cooperate and compete. Ideally, this grounding phenomenon would be transcontextual and transdisciplinary and panorganic – common to all forms of life. It would contain objective, subjective and inter-subjective aspects, and we would rec-ognise our self and our lives in it in a way that is politically relevant and spiritually mean-ingful.

The Philosopher and author Robert Pirsig passed away earlier this year, and he comes to mind in this context. His bestseller, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (and latterly, *Lila*) was partly a critique of what he called 'Subject-object metaphysics' – a dualist view of the world that he felt was subtly tearing us apart. The dualist societal backdrop examined by Pirsig has overlaps with the Cartesian view that mind and matter are fundamentally different substances, but it is more abstract and also slightly deeper. A society's metaphysics indirectly shapes how we live and work together, and Pirsig's enduring contribution was to make such metaphysics matter. The most distilled expression of what he called his 'metaphysics of quality' was "Between the subject and the object lies the value" – a profoundly important claim for a society struggling with subjectivity, objectivity and values.

Towards the end of his book *Lila: An inquiry into Morals* he says the best short summary of his metaphysics is "Good is a noun" – a radical idea for cultures that assume good is an adjective. Attentive readers will see some tension here with my contention in the preface that thinking of spiritual matters in terms of the complex noun 'spirituality' is unhelpful. I don't think Pirsig is making a claim of that nature. His point is that there is a pervasive pre-intellectual reality that is 'good' and that we sense, but we are cut off from it through our concepts and habits. I think that's right, and this directly perceived reality is what Zen Buddhists draw our attention to. My favourite expression of this idea is Tim Harding's seriously playful account detailed in his classic text *On Having no Head*

"The best day of my life—my rebirthday, so to speak—was when I found I had no head. This is not a literary gambit, a witticism designed to arouse interest at any cost. I mean it in all seriousness: I have no head (…). What actually happened was something absurdly simple and unspectacular: I stopped thinking. A peculiar quiet, an odd kind of alert limpness or numbness, came over me. Reason and imagination and all mental chatter died down. For once, words really failed me. Past and future dropped away. I forgot who and what I was, my name, manhood, animalhood, all that could be called mine. It was as if I had been born that instant, brand new, mindless, innocent of all memories. There existed only the Now, that present moment and what was clearly given in it. To look was enough. And what I found was khaki trousers terminating downwards in a pair of brown shoes, khaki sleeves terminating sideways in a pair of pink hands, and a khaki shirtfront terminating upwards in—absolutely nothing whatever! Certainly not in a head. It took me no time at all to notice that this nothing, this hole where a head should have been was no ordinary vacancy, no mere nothing. On the contrary, it was very much occupied. It was a vast emptiness vastly filled, a nothing that found room for everything—room for grass, trees, shadowy distant hills, and far above them snow peaks like a row of angular clouds riding the blue sky. I had lost a head and gained a world….Its total presence was my total absence, body and soul….it felt like a sudden waking from the sleep of ordinary life, an end to dreaming."

What Harding experiences there is called by many names, including 'good', but also reality or spirit and even God, but let's try to be very clear what this does and doesn't mean.

At the climax of his first book Pirsig suggests that the resolution of the subject-object relationship leads to a perception of value or what he elsewhere calls quality, and that is identified with the Tao, Brahman or the underlying reality. The underlying reality that Pirsig insists on highlighting can be equated with God, but doesn't have to be. For many, the root metaphor of God is a single absolutely extraordinary person and that notion is what atheists typically reject as absurd or unhelpful – no matter how many layers of sophistication or subtlety you bring to your bearded man in the sky, he risks being uncovered.

But there is a tragedy here, because most who don't believe in God mostly reject one particular idea of the divine that they have culturally outgrown without fully realising what they have lost. In most classical and many modern theological conceptions of the divine, God is more like 'the ground of being' – not a particular being, but the absolute, or being as such. That can be an entirely abstract notion – the God underlying mathematical beauty that Physicists like Einstein and Stephen Hawking posit as a heuristic device but don't really believe in; or the God that Thich Nhat Hanh and the Dalai Lama are happy to refer to, even though Buddhists don't conventionally believe in God as such.[338]

In most classical conceptions, God is also much more like a relationship than an individual. This idea is fundamental to the Christian conception of the Trinity but also the Vedantic notion of Creator, Preserver and Destroyer. Of course there are many other conceptions, but the general idea is that God can be thought of more like a creative relational process rather than a single moralising entity. David Bentley Hart's sustained commentary on the nature and experience of God across traditions as 'Being, Consciousness and Bliss' is particularly compelling.[339] Moreover, I am fond of Rowan Williams's elegant distilled definition of God as 'Love and mathematics'. Love and mathematics are perhaps the ultimate reference points for subject and object respectively. It is also true that you can believe in the truth, beauty and goodness of love and mathematics without believing in God at all.[340]

What is relevant in the context of Spiritualise and for Perspectiva's purposes is to reflect on why Pirsig's complex critique of a worldview in which subjects and objects were radically separate cut through to such an extent, selling over 5 million copies. Why did people feel this analysis was culturally and politically so pertinent? As indicated in part one even the Neuroscientist and Philosopher Sam Harris – an arch rationalist and atheist, says we need to reclaim the language of the spiritual to designate "the deliberate efforts some people make to overcome their feeling of separateness."[341]

We are not always going to agree about the substance of abstraction, nor can we answer perennial questions, but there is scope for common ground here. We need further perspective to understand what we disagree about and why at the most fundamental levels – and then try to build a better world together from that more complex, discerning and generous vantage point. Pirsig may be remembered for a book about a motorcycle trip he took with his son, but his main philosophical claim is that ultimate reality exists in neither the subject nor the object, but the relationship between them, and that relationship is a kind of experience of quality or value that can be directly known to us. There must be a way to work together from that level of understanding.

The relationship between subject and object is implicit in a huge range of philosophies but made explicit in Robert Kegan's theoretical models of lifelong human development in social and cultural context, developed in his books *The Evolving Self* (1982) and In *Over Our Heads* (1994). This is a perspective that connects *Bildung*, examined above, to a grounding phenomenon and helps clarify what individual and collective growth relative to that grounding phenomenon might look like.

Kegan's theory is a stage model of adult development, but in many ways those stages are a distraction. A couple of examples illustrate what this subject-object relationship looks like in practice.

Two brothers are on the top of the Empire State Building. The two-year old looks down and says: "Look at the people, they are tiny ants." The eight-year old replies: "Yes, the people look like tiny ants." One of them thinks what he sees, while the other can think about what he sees. Were the eight-year old to try to correct the two year old, it is unlikely he would be understood—that capacity to theorise about perception is precisely what his younger brother can't yet do. As Kegan puts it: "He is not individuated from them; he is embedded in them. They define the very structure of his attention."[342]

The co-founder of Perspectiva Tomas had the rare chance to witness a subject to object transition 'live' at a youth camp in Sweden a few years ago. A 14-year-old girl complained to one of the leaders a few years her senior that she was so stressed out by all the things she wanted to do: hang out with friends, play football, spend time on Facebook etc. The older leader asked some clever questions and then the girl suddenly burst out in surprise: "Now I see! I don't actually have to do all I want to do." Up until that moment, her wants had "had" her. Now, perhaps for the first time ever, she could see her own wants as an object for reflection and decide what to do with them. She now "had" her wants, had better choices, and her freedom had increased.

The examples of the subject-object shift become increasingly complex as we get older, and further complexity is added when we use this lens with organisations or other emergent social phenomena. However, at heart Kegan's models are fundamentally a deepening, refining and extending of Jean Piaget's ground breaking work in genetic

epistemology (it is worth remembering that Einstein considered Piaget a genius). Piaget's theory has naturalistic roots in open systems biology but ultimately amounts to a theory of the nature and evolution of consciousness. I believe Kegan's Piaget might be Pirsig's metaphysics of quality in motion:

"Piaget's vision…does not place an energy system within us so much as it places us in a single energy system of all living things. Its primary attention, then, is not to shifts and changes in an internal equilibrium in the world, but to an equilibrium in the world, between the progressively individuated self and the bigger life field, an interaction sculpted by both and constitutive of reality itself."[343]

Kegan's attention to the 'form' of knowing is what sets his theory apart because the form is the subject-object relationship. New information may add to the things a person knows, but transformation is about changes in the way he or she knows things; changing the form of the meaning-making system—making it more complex, more comfortable with plurality and uncertainty – that capacity for complexity amounts to a question of what we are subject to. Individually it might be our need for attention, status or other kinds of emotional validation, and politically it might be the need to valorise participation, demonize opponents or indefinitely increase GDP. Transformation occurs when we are newly able to step back and reflect on and make decisions about something i.e. take as object what we were previously subject-to. The transformation that underlies *Bildung* are therefore changes not just in the way people behave or what they know, but in the way they know." [344]

The point that Pirsig, Piaget and Kegan are making in different ways is that it is not that the world is comprised of living things and their contexts and they change each other; it's that the fundamental 'thing' is not a thing at all. Life itself is a relationship between living thing and context, and that relationship is primary and the relational process is always in motion. Such a viewpoint is of course axiomatic to much of eastern philosophy and systems theory. On reflection, our failure to appreciate this primary relationship is part of the astonishment that I mentioned at the beginning of this introduction.

In Spiritualise I highlighted UK research that suggested 'relational consciousness' is central to those who consider their outlook broadly spiritual. That kind of consciousness arises from the broader shift to viewing the world through the lens of systems. A systems perspective does not mean machine-like diagrams with lots of suggestive arrows, but living relationships that exist across contexts and learn, through an ongoing process that Nora Bateson has coined 'symmathesy' – entities formed over time in contextual mutual learning through interaction.[345] The notion that the social world is awash with systems that are comprised of subject-object relationships is also closely related to 'new science' as outlined by the French Philosopher Edgar Morin:

"It supposes and makes explicit an ontology that not only puts the accent on relation rather than on substance but also puts the accent on emergence and on interference, as constitutive phenomena of the object. There is not only a formal network of relations, there are realities, but these are not essences, not a single substance. They are rather composites, produced by systemic interplay, but at the same time endowed with a certain autonomy."[346]

That abstract statement echoes Pirsig and Kegan and contains an absolutely fundamental point that lies at the heart of the challenge to civilization. In the West we are trained to see relationships in terms of their points of reference, but this is at best a partial understanding and at worst delusional because it makes it hard to understand much that gives life value. As Gregory Bateson puts it: "The major problems in the world are the result of the difference between how nature works and the way people think."[347]

Systems, souls and society

Thus far we have considered the crisis (ecological, technological, economic, social, political) the ideological context of that crisis (neoliberalism, neonationalism and solutionism) and the meta-crisis (a combination of ethical drift, epistemic failure, existential confusion and emotional disorientation) which I have argued is ultimately spiritual in nature, calling for a reorientation of self through the cultivation of spiritual sensibility and a new operating principle for society – *Bildung*. A deeper examination of the challenge of conceptualizing the meaningful spiritual 'growth' of individuals and society led us to consider the subject-object relationship underlying life in all its forms.

Until this point the unit of analysis has been mostly the individual in a societal context, rather than society as such. The Anthropologist Clifford Geertz famously said that "Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance that he himself has spun" and dealing with the meta-crisis is about knowing the webs and knowing ourselves as their spinners.[348]

It is easy to get lost in intellectual cartography, but when concrete problems are multiplying, there is nothing more practical than abstraction – eliminating the inessential so that the essential may speak. Leaving cosmology and metaphysics to one side, 'the social imaginary' is the most abstract analytical tool available to get things in the fullest, broadest and deepest context. As Charles Taylor puts it in Modern Social Imaginaries: The social imaginary is "a wider grasp of our whole predicament". Also, it is "not a set of ideas; rather it is what enables through making sense of, the practices of society." [349]

The imaginary sets the scene – it is the given through which we wrestle with variables. Our social imaginary is the background shared understanding that makes 'the market', 'the individual' or 'globalisation' seem like real things rather than arbitrary so-

cial constructions. You can even say, in Kegan's terms, that the social imaginary is what we are subject to at a societal level, and the challenge of shifting the social imaginary is first realising that we are subject to it, and how. Rather than focus on 'solving problems' we need courage and tenacity to insist on 'backing up' to find the social imaginary that gives rise to our idea of what is problematic and why. In a related context, the Philosopher of living systems Gregory Bateson puts the same point like this:

"I have very little sympathy for these arguments from the world's "need". I noticed that those who pander to its needs are often well paid. I distrust the applied scientists' claim that what they do is useful and necessary. I suspect that their impatient enthusiasm for action, their rarin'-to-go, is not just a symptom of impatience, nor is it pure buccaneering ambition. I suspect that it covers deep epistemological panic."[350]

Epistemological panic arises from a failure to tenaciously ask what it means to know and what kinds of knowing we most need; and it manifests in our apparent inability to tell a coherent story about what is happening in the world. No wonder you can barely walk a hundred metres in any major city without encountering someone who wants to 'change the system' or just eager for some kind of 'transformation' – both are quintessential expressions of epistemological panic. It is often in the nature of systems to change anyway, and who is to say which systems matter most and what kinds of changes are good or bad or meaningful? 'Systems change' therefore risks being vacuous as a rallying cry – it may be necessary, and it sounds bold and visionary, but actually means very little by itself. Likewise with 'transformation' – from what into what, how, and why? Unless you situated your call for systems change or transformation in relation to the prevailing imaginary and the relevant subject-object relationships they contain, you are unlikely to make an enduring impact.

While part of Perspectiva's purpose is to support and promote the ontological and epistemological maturity of systems thinking, we also want to highlight the risks of doing it badly and the cultural and political limitations of thinking only in systemic terms. In this respect, the spiritual emphasis is a necessary corrective to an over-emphasis on the system 'out there'; whether the system is complex and adaptive or non-linear or has any other bells and whistles 'the system' is invariably approached with reference to a social imaginary and understood through projections that stem from the system 'in here' as much as the cultural context of the system 'out there'. What we believe is needed to deepen social change processes is therefore a way of thinking and acting across systems, souls and society.

Perspectiva's 'Systems, souls and society' framework is a simple encapsulation of our desire to understand complex challenges from at least three perspectives; things as they are, things as they are experienced and known, and things as they are shared, represented, institutionalised, contested and discussed. Our triptych is distantly inspired by Philosopher Karl Popper's Three Worlds Hypothesis (objective, subjective and in-

ter-objective) and by Social Theorist Felix Guattari in his famous essay, 'Three Ecologies' (environmental, personal, social)[351].

The point common to all related models is the recognition that there are at least three fundamentally different kinds of 'stuff' (ontology) in the world that are known to us in different ways (epistemology). Clearly each of these frameworks are maps of reality, not the territory. Moreover, they are maps of one territory containing three kinds of terrain that all require different kinds of map. There is unity in this diversity, but we can't see it until we acknowledge the diversity.

John Thompson, drawing on the ideas of Cornelius Castoriadis, the foremost thinker of imaginaries, describes the central imaginary significations of a society as "the laces which tie a society together and the forms which define what, for a given society, is "real" '.[352] Arguably that has been part of the problem with the communication of climate science. There has been a limited conception of what is real leading to an overemphasis on the objective facts and probabilities (the climatic system) while taking the subjective (experienced meaning of the facts and probabilities) and inter-subjective (how we talk about it) and inter-objective (how we build institutions to reflect the fuller reality) for granted as relatively unimportant factors. That imbalance is being redressed now, but we have lost several decades of precious time, and related problems are mounting.

Purposive Pluralism

The brilliant Chilean Biologist, Buddhist and Phenomenologist Francisco Varela captures the ethical and spiritual value of this perspective by linking it to the fundamental integration of subjective experience and objective knowledge in the following extended quotation:

"That the world should have this plastic texture, neither subjective nor objective, not one and separable, neither two are inseparable, is fascinating. It points both to the nature of the process...as well as to the fundamental limits about what we can understand about ourselves and the world. It shows that reality is not just constructed at our whim, for that would be to assume that there is a starting point we can choose from inside first. It also shows that reality cannot be understood as given and that we are to perceive it and pick it up, as a recipient, for that would also be to assume a starting point: outside first. It shows, indeed, the fundamental groundlessness of our experience, where we are given regularities and interpretations born out of our common history as biological beings and social entities.

Within those consensual domains of common history we live in an apparently endless metamorphosis of interpretations following interpretations... It reveals to us a world

where...the age-old idea of objectivity and communication as progressive elimination of error for gradual attunement is, by its own scientific standards, a chimera.

We should do better to fully accept the notoriously different and more difficult situation of existing in a world where no one in particular can have a claim to better understanding in a universal sense. This is indeed interesting: that the empirical world of the living and the logic of self-reference, that the whole of the natural history of circularity should tell us that ethics – tolerance and pluralism, detachment from our own perceptions and values to allow for those of others – is the very foundation of knowledge, and also its final point. At this point, actions are clearer than words."[353]

Varela's point is that there is a freedom in detaching from one correct view of the world, and also an implicit ethics – we need a story, yes, but it has to be a story of stories. We need perspective yes, but it has to be perspective on perspectives. We need a vision, yes, but it has to be prismatic; a vision of visions.

We do not have to fear what Pat Kane calls 'mad relativism', because we retain shared reference points. The move towards a more conscious society is also therefore about knowing that within certain constraints (for instance the reality of anthropogenic climate change) there are indeed fundamental choices about how to live and what to value, and valuing that. In this respect it's about freeing ourselves from the relatively tribal conditioning of hoping 'our side' or 'our people' will 'win' - something most people in society are invariably somewhat subject to. In Kegan's terms, becoming ,more conscious' means "To resist our tendencies to make right or true, that which is merely familiar, and wrong or false, that which is only strange."[354]

But how? Buckminster Fuller famously said "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete." The idea of changing the operating principle of society and thereby the social imaginary is not new, but the way we do it will have to be.

It would be hubristic to present a plan of action or even a theory of change given the scope of what we are considering, but there are some useful points of emphasis that will help us navigate a direction of travel and some small steps towards it.

The world as we find it is more emergent than manifest. Today's norms will be tomorrow's clichés. Our predictions might prove to be lucky guesses, but mostly they will be wrong. We don't really know what is going on. It is absurd to think we can craft and control a message that will survive contact with a Youtube remix or Twitterstorm. Nor can we expect to create a policy consensus that will be objectively assessed and rationally decided upon.

What we find instead is a world awash with goodness and soul and hope and daz-

zling creativity, yes; but also delusion, denial, misinformation, confirmation bias, filter bubbles and epistemic shamelessness. It is also an increasingly disintermediated world of 'prosumers' where people use new technologies to rapidly create viable new products and services and thereby shape new realities without institutional support or enculturation (although many more will fail trying).

Moreover, the institutional barriers to ways forward emerging are enormous. As Philosopher John Gray never tires of reminding us, 'Humanity' as such does not have agency, but is rather defined by competing interests among a range of groups within and between nations. Faith in Global Governance remains low, despite the apparent success of Paris Cop 21 on climate change and progress on some UN development goals. And we are working on a burning platform as the impacts of climate change are already biting and artificial intelligence makes millions jobless.

In this technological and political context, the idea that we can somehow create a metanarrative that our systems, souls and societies framework will coalesce around and respond to positively seems somewhere between audacious and absurd. Many don't care, and those who do care are never likely to agree.

The vision of spiritual renewal in which the world collectively comes to its senses through sustained spiritual discipline and luminous paradigmatic insight, then arrives at a new social imaginary and then finds it has new epistemic and ontological foundations and then can thereby radically alter our political and economic course is more like a compass than a map. But when you don't really know where you are, the main thing you need to know is which way to go.

At present this kind of radical rethinking of the world lacks capital, political power, technological expression, media buy-in and institutional support. In Marxian terms the groups coalescing around such visions tend to remain groups 'in-themselves' rather than groups 'for-themselves'. That distinction is another way of saying that we struggle to unite because we lack a larger shared frame of reference to help us get beyond our differences. The question is whether we can get one. Most of the time policy is driven by a persuasive but selective story, offering only a partial view of the world.

To consider an analogous attempt to change the world, The Mont Pelerin society is a highly influential international community of scholars and statesmen with a particular view of freedom that is broadly about combatting collectivism and trusting market logic and individual self-interest to deliver a better society. The MPS initially met in April, 1947, at an event in Switzerland hosted by Philosopher Frederic Hayek. Many believe this meeting was the genesis of neoliberal thought and the economistic and technocratic approach to government that followed in the ensuing decades including Reaganomics in the US and Thatcherism in the UK.[355]

Many progressive thinkers have suggested we need to do something like that. The Club of Rome, for instance, seems to operate in a similar spirit. The idea, crudely stated, is that we need to get an impressive network together and figure out the kind of world we want, decide what would need to happen to bring it about, craft policy to direct that change and communication strategies to support it, and then go back to our respective positions of influence and make it happen. But it is not going to work, because we don't live in a world like that anymore.

In 1947 top-down leadership was still the norm. Mass media was just beginning to emerge. Globalisation was not yet a thing and very few had global awareness. Supranational institutions were in their infancy. There was no internet or social media. There was no rolling media available on handheld devices. At that time, and for about half a century afterwards, it was conceivable that you could control policy and messaging at a national level and coordinate national efforts to create a new paradigm. But not anymore. There may still be a role for top-down leadership, for strategy and for planning, but this approach will have to be several orders of magnitude more adaptive, nimble and perspicacious to be relevant in a world awash with wicked problems and mixed messages.

Another strategy is to rely on mass movements and mobilisation to campaign, for instance through organised marches, online Avaaz petitions, and lobbying – the classic NGO playbook. Despite the obvious strengths and successes of this approach, one limitation is that the form of sentiment underlying mass mobilisation necessarily tends to be expressed through messages that are relatively simplistic, moralistic, indignant and insistent – that's what creates volumes of supporters. Moreover, it is just much easier to campaign against something than for something; so much easier to critique than create, and anger and victimhood are galvanising. Mass mobilisation rails against the system, but often tacitly reinforces our divisive culture.

Another model of change is to set some minimal conditions and then trust in the tacit wisdom of individual initiative, creative collaboration and market logics for innovation of various kinds to transform the world. The limitation of this belief in enterprise is that collective action and legitimacy problems abound, and economic logics without substantive social and cultural moorings tend to lead to concentrations of power through economies of scale. Small may be beautiful, but large is often more efficient and therefore more profitable.[356]

These models of change and the relationship between them loosely map on to cultural theory, coordination theory, or theories of plural rationalities outlined by Mary Douglas and developed by a range of academics including Michael Thompson, Marco Verwej and policy thought leaders including the RSA's Chief Executive Matthew Taylor.

Social Psychologist Barry Schwartz summarises the main idea as follows:

"Each way of life undermines itself. Individualism would mean chaos without hierarchical authority to endorse contracts and repel enemies. To get work done and settle disputes the egalitarian order needs hierarchy, too. Hierarchies, in turn, would be stagnant without the creative energy of individualism, uncohesive without the binding force of equality, unstable without the passivity and acquiescence of fatalism. Dominant and subordinate ways of life thus exist in alliance yet this relationship is fragile, constantly shifting, constantly generating a societal environment conducive to change." [357]

What is often left out of commentaries on these models is the fatalistic worldview, which is often disparaged or ignored, but from a spiritual perspective it needs some attention. As Ian Christie has highlighted in a personal communication: "We need to distinguish between fatalisms. There is a nihilistic fatalism that is about giving up and giving in; you can't do anything about the forces who are either out to get you or don't care about you, and who in either case dictate the terms of your life, and in any case, what do we have to lose? But there is a faithful or hopeful fatalism; one that accepts key features of the human predicament we typically ignore, namely our mortality, rivalry and xenophobia (which can precipitate violence and scapegoating at all times) and the evanescence of all our achievements. Someone who holds a broadly religious position knows that so much earthly effort comes to nothing, and that there are forces in basic human sociality that mean we always run the risk of violence, scapegoating and breakdown of cooperation. The best we can do is to resist these forces in ourselves - positive renunciation - and cooperate with others who feel the same way, so as to build up communities of virtuous practice. The achievement is hard-won and always vulnerable, but also always worthwhile."

Keeping these four perspectives in mind, how we respond to the meta crisis and what *Bildung* looks like in practice depends on your working assumptions and ideology about policy and politics.

For hierarchical planners it is about growing epistemically; acquiring the disposition to think probabilistically, metaphorically and systemically to gleam a deeper diagnosis of wicked problems.

For egalitarians it is about building solidarity by cultivating empathy with people's varying and competing perspectives.

For 'individualists' or entrepreneurs it is about pro-active self-development as an invisible-hand style panacea for social need.

For fatalists it is a nudge towards hopeful fatalism or perhaps a pathway beyond fatalism.

The approach has to be 'clumsy' in the best sense of the term- applying each of

these in whatever combination works for any given challenge.

Then the question becomes how spiritual sensibility may help in the context of the kinds of purposive pluralism and clumsy solutions we need. That is an open question, but a generative one and Perspectiva will be thinking it through. My current intuition is that small groups are likely to be key; they can act as an antidote to fatalism and digital saturation, they are small enough to encourage rather than squash individual initiative, but large enough to potentially exert influence on power, and through social support and challenge they encourage learning and growing.

The key to developing spiritual sensibility may therefore be 'clumsy communities' – small groups that recognise the inestimable value of working together, without illusions about the scale of the challenges we face. Of course it will take much more than that to deal with the crisis – we need radical institutional change, clear sighted policy and strong global governance. But for the meta-crisis that burns along and within and beyond the crisis, we need to help each other keep growing.

Nora Bateson puts the point beautifully:

"I maintain, at the risk of being called abstract, that the possibility of an increase in our ability to receive nuanced information about the interactions in a complex system exists. This is my optimism. This is where I place my hope for the coming eras. We need that sensitivity to live better lives. This is the sensitivity that will allow us to understand our spouses better, to raise our children better, to grow food better, study life better, and organise our world better. It will also make us into artists. I maintain that nothing could be more practical."[358]

Tribes against tribalism

"What we needed were not words and promises but the steady accumulation of small realities."-Haruki Murakami

Purposive pluralism requires a renewed commitment to purpose and an intelligent grasp of how enduring and shared purpose arises in the context of diversity of values, perspectives and interests. In this respect, the Canadian philosopher John Ralston Saul makes a strong case for the notion of disinterest being a critical feature of purposive pluralism, and indeed of healthy democracy – what should be the institutional vessel of purposive pluralism. This idea that we need more disinterest feels odd at first blush, but we are not advocating 'lack of interest' at all. What matters in this context is the capacity to engage in a way that is both intensely interested, and yet not trying to advance any particular interest. Disinterested democracy is the very opposite of a transactional view of democracy, giving rise to 'retail politics' – you (demographic, group, constit-

uency) vote for me, and I'll give you this public service or that tax break. Disinterested politics is about placing the public interest ahead of any particular interest – about trying to view the system as a whole and thinking about what it needs to function best. This spirit of disinterest in captured in deliberative research but rarely otherwise.[359]

The challenge for democracy is at least partly a challenge to develop spiritual sensibility such that we stop imagining we either care about everybody or just care about ourselves, and recognise that this is a false dichotomy. A healthy democracy should be a place where individuals feel they have a duty to promote the public good, not just narrowly protect of advance a narrow conception of their own interests at the cost of others.[360]

One example of what this looks like in practice is in the Danish Alternative party's six debate principles:

We will openly discuss both the advantages and the disadvantages of a certain argument or line of action.

We will listen more than we speak, and we will meet our political opponents on their own ground.

We will emphasize the core set of values that guide our arguments.

We will acknowledge when we have no answer to a question or when we make mistakes.

We will be curious about each and every person with whom we are debating.

We will argue openly and factually as to how The Alternative's political vision can be realized.

Denmark's Alternativet party have by no means seized power, but they have broken through to the Danish mainstream and throughout Europe at least there is an appetite and a growing audience for such ideals. The question is how we cultivate the underlying sentiments that would lead to that kind of dialogue and inquiry and the wiser policies we would expect to come out of it.

In The End of the Party? Indra Adnan, co-initiator of the Alternative UK points out that less than 5% of the UK population is a member of a political party, and asks what politics has to become to help release our underlying human and social potential.[361] Similarly, in a fascinating post, Richard D Bartlett argued that if culture change is what we ultimately need most, we need people to challenge us on an ongoing basis. Consider the following:

"An increasing mass of people agree that long term human survival depends on

us replacing the status quo with a fundamentally different set of behaviours and structures. I believe the root of that challenge is essentially cultural, and the best place to grow culture is in small groups. And until we've got a critical mass of activists who are embedded in a new way of thinking, relating and communicating, any mass movement is going to replicate the errors of the past." [362]

Bartlett develops the case to say that small groups are, inter-alia, a place to learn new habits, to practice tolerance, a place for amateur therapy, to produce living proof, and to prepare for the worst. My minimal condition for what makes a group functionally 'small' in this context is that people can fit in the same room, and know each other's names. The anthropological heuristic here is 150; beyond that level trust is harder to maintain and self-organisation is likely to start breaking down, but of course the numbers can be much smaller.[363]

What matters is that such 'little platoons', to use the term of Conservative philosopher Edmund Burke, are not merely self-serving and thereby become tribal or ideological. Retaining the qualities of spiritual sensibility, *Bildung* and disinterest and navigating our own inner pluralism are a necessary part of the cultural change we need to address our meta-crisis. Partly in jest, but totally in earnest, I have used some alliteration to indicate the kinds of themes such small groups might build activities and plans and campaigns around. Perspectiva is currently considering how we might host or facilitate or experiment with this kind of small group building process. Some such groups already exist, but may not yet meet on a regular basis or even see themselves as the kind of clumsy community we need. As Anthropologist Margaret Mead famously put it: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Mindful Moderates are responding to smart phone addiction, reckless consumerism and the ambient advertising that fuels it. The existence of The Mindfulness Initiative[364] helps to highlight the politics of attention; partly what Tom Chatfield and James Williams and others calls 'the attention economy'—the monetisation of our eye movements, but mostly what political theorist Matthew Crawford calls 'the attentional commons'—the need to fight for a precious resource that is uniquely ours, and insist on our 'right not to be addressed'.

Psychedelic Pragmatists are responding both to the rise of mental health problems and the lack of political vision. Organisations like The Psychedelic Society are interested in the political generativity of ecstatic or transcendent experiences, expressed as heightened 'states of consciousness' where connectedness and bliss are prominent (and safe). [365]

Only after you've 'been there', they suggest, do you realise just how screwed up our society is. There is a growing body of evidence about the surprisingly common[366] re-

porting of spiritual experiences, and clinical evidence about their therapeutic value.[367] There is always a risk of course, not least of fetishising the experience and going back for more rather than using it to better ground oneself in the world. But here's a good conversational gambit: What if getting real means getting high?

Developmental Democrats are responding to societal complexity with a focus on maturational development.[368] For them, people need to grow in their capability to think systemically and generate suitably 'clumsy' solutions in response to 'wicked' problems like climate change. The perceptual (how we see) and epistemological (how we know) changes reflect 'stages of consciousness'; this is theoretically well developed terrain and empirically solid (if varied). Perspectiva hopes to give this idea an institutional home and Metamoderna make it a central feature of their book The Listening Society.

Therapeutic Technocrats emphasise the centrality of emotion, responding to the futility of indignation, self-righteousness and the breakdown of social trust. Psychosynthesis, psychodynamic therapies, psychoanalysis and analytical psychology are all in this space. The claim here is that we need to develop emotionally and psychologically to get beyond personal defensiveness and psychological projection, which are arguably key limitations of a conventional left wing world view. As Charlotte Millar has put it: "There is a lot of ego in victimhood." [369] Recent research on 'Human Givens' – shared underlying emotional needs gives great source material for such a group to discuss and act upon.[370]

Religious Rooters are responding to the lack of institutional leadership in the public realm and for the common good. The other groups are their unmoored allies. Where are the institutional forms, historical narratives, and established norms and rituals to give such change processes a real chance of taking root? The report Something More poses this question well.[371] Religions have plenty of baggage of course, but have been trying to connect personal change and political change for millennia. It would be foolish not to learn from them.

In addition, a few other important groups that might emerge include:

The Spiritually Sane: Atheists, religious believers, and especially for everybody else - perhaps the silent majority – should have places and processes that allow them to reflect on and experience the normative foundations of society. Advocating spiritual sanity could be about building society around the pre-eminence of love, the reality of death, the need to integrate and transcend the self, and exquisite experiences of the soul.

Purposive Pluralists need to help us build a 'story of stories' about how 9 billion people live well together, and of course with themselves. Value pluralism is a feature of the world not a bug, but debilitating value relativism does not follow. Unity of purpose can

be forged through myths and metanarratives, but high ideals must recognise power, struggle and conflict.

Reflexive Realists are needed to remind us that we will only really change the world by changing perceptions of how reality is constituted. 'Getting real' means a more integrated view of systems, souls, society and the situations they give rise to. Perspectiva encourages ontological activism – taking the pervasive injunction to 'get real' seriously. Reality is not just how things are now - 'world to mind'. Reality is also 'mind to world', what we create through words, actions, networks and symbols.[372]

Attention Activists: Aldous Huxley was right about the need to cleanse the doors of perception. Attention is our most personal and precious resource but we are increasingly unfree in the manner in which we use it. Attention activists will find common cause with the Mindful Moderates, but for those less interested in mindfulness as a response, we also need to think through the social and political questions about how we protect what Matthew Crawford calls 'The Attentional Commons'. Moreover, in terms of emotional needs, we should also ask how we can ensure that everyone both gives and receives attention on a regular basis.[373]

Epistemic Emissaries: Knowledge and power do not always align, partly because it is often in the interests of the powerful to limit what we know and how we know. Perhaps we need epistemology to become a familiar everyday term, a minimal condition of education, and we need to see how epistemology operates in our political life. We also need to recognise epistemic diversity, multiple ways of knowing, including a range of minority perspectives, epistemologies from the near and far east, and the epistemologies of our political opponents. These discussions might move outside of academia into the mainstream, and swiftly.

These myriad ways of cultivating spiritual sensibility and considering how it applies to the meta-crisis need not be not 'talking shops' (and the alliteration is optional). They should be characterised by discussion and analysis, yes, but also by forms of transformative practise and discerning activism. I don't see them so much as small community groups but more like interest groups arising within organisations and institutions that are looking for ways to deepen their sense of meaning and purpose; bring a measure of transformative disinterest to an instrumental world that doesn't quite know where it is going.

It is unclear how such groups might manifest culturally, but they are responses to a lack of spiritual sanity, simplistic relativism, oppressive calls to 'get real', the war on our attention, epistemological panic, lack of political vision, rampant consumerism, misplaced allergic reactions to religion, futile indignation, and the erosion of the public realm. It is a massive project of cultural change waiting to happen, and it is up to us to begin to make it happen.

And to believe such cultural change can happen is not just wishful thinking, but more like what our current predicament indicates, and invites. Sociologist Robert Bellah helps point towards the kind of exploration and integration I have in mind:

"We may be seeing the beginnings of the reintegration of our culture, a new possibility of the unity of consciousness. If so, it will not be on the basis of any new orthodoxy, either religious or scientific. Such a new integration will be based on the rejection of all univocal understandings of reality, of all identifications of one conception of reality with reality itself. It will recognize the multiplicity of the human spirit, and the necessity to translate constantly between different scientific and imaginative vocabularies. It will recognize the human proclivity to fall comfortably into some single literal interpretation of the world and therefore the necessity to be continuously open to rebirth in a new heaven and a new earth. It will recognize that in both scientific and religious culture all we have finally are symbols, but that there is an enormous difference between the dead letter and the living word."[374]

The question then becomes, what is the pattern that connects? If we really have to split into groups every so often, and if our answers must necessarily diverge, what are the questions we share? What are we working on together?

Eight Questions to live for

In part two I suggested that every culturally sanctioned form of knowledge contains an implicit injunction. I still believe that the spiritual injunction is principally an experiential one, namely to know oneself as fully as possible. However, that claim was never a call for greater introspection or narcissism – far from it. As indicated throughout this book you cannot know yourself without being situated in historical time, geographical space and political context. Knowing yourself today means knowing you are biology, fashioned through a myriad of human and non-human relationships and emotional and economic needs. You may be more, and you may transcend those perspectives at particular moments, but you can't bypass them in how you live your life.

The spiritual injunction to 'know yourself' is therefore expansive, inclusive, integrative and transformative in nature. You begin to realise that you cannot change yourself in a meaningful way without a much deeper engagement with the world as a whole, and you begin to sense that the world will not change significantly unless people change significantly.

As Director of Perspectiva I would now express the spiritual injunction slightly differently – the point is to know life more fully in a way that helps you become more fully alive.

What better way is there to know life more fully than by living in response to the major questions of our lives and of our time. These 'how' questions are about the dispositions we need to acquire and they arise naturally from the cultivation of spiritual sensibility. The personal spiritual question may be: Who am I, and who am I becoming? But we come to know who we are by trying to fashion the world we want to live in.

So here are the contexts Perspectiva seeks to respond to and the questions we exist to help ask and answer:

In a world of ecological limits and runaway technology…

How do we survive?

In an ever shifting cultural and economic context…

How do we adapt?

Amidst pervasive epistemic confusion and immaturity...

How do we know?

When we create reality and yet are created by it…

How do we 'get real'?

When we sense automaticity is not always our friend…

How do we wake up?

When values and priorities inevitably clash every day...

How do we love?

When we want to address injustice, by aligning power and love...

How do we serve?

When we need to build a world beyond consumerism...

How do we live better, larger lives?

These questions are as difficult as they are generative, and thankfully many are now asking them. Perspectiva is part of a larger global network that is taking the relationship between complex global challenges and the inner lives of human beings seriously. We are working with many emerging organisations closely and the best current reference point for our larger shared endeavour is www.emerge.network.

In my experience, there is widespread despair about the world, but also eager anticipation. There is a sense that while civilization as we know it may be dying, it could yet give birth to something unimaginably different and better. I have tried to contextualize some of the sources of that necessary transformation in Spiritualise, and to show why new technologies or new economic and political thinking won't be enough to get there; we need greater depth and breadth and fullness of perspective. Cultivating spiritual sensibility is therefore about growing in response to our challenges, individually and collectively. This, I believe, is a source of credible hope, and the liberation story of our time.

Acknowledgments

First edition (December 2014)

This report is the culmination of a process that began in the Autumn of 2011, featuring contributions from around 300 people, not all of whom I can thank here, but some whom I wish to thank more than once. If 'relational consciousness' is indeed a distinctive feature of spiritual experience, I am glad to be able to convey the extent to which that defined informed this report:

For the financial support that made the project possible I am very grateful to The John Templeton Foundation, particularly Program Officer Nicholas Gibson and Senior Associate Megan Graziano; and The Touchstone Trust, particularly Paul and Brigid Hains.

The Royal Society of Arts provided the institutional platform that gave profile and broader social significance to the work, and I would like to thank Executive team members Matthew Taylor, Adam Lent, Nina Bolognesi and Carol Jackson who supported the project substantively and operationally at different stages. I am also grateful to Steve Broome, Esther McCarthy, and Luke Robinson for their invaluable contributions to research, fundraising and media respectively; and to valued colleagues Nathalie Spencer and Janet Hawken for their reliable and high quality back up, particularly towards the end. I am also grateful to RSA Trustees, particularly Peter Feel and Andy Gibson, and a range of RSA fellows for their moral and substantive support.

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For much needed assistance at a difficult time I extend a special thank you to Jules Evans, who swiftly brought together a range of impressive people to contribute to our

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I am grateful to Chris Harding for helping to kick-start the writing process, with substantial thoughts on an earlier draft structure and an erudite analysis of the workshop contributions, which informed the final report. Andres Fossas played a crucial role in the final six months, as a researcher, transcriber, summariser, fan, critic, and sounding board. I am sure I couldn't have finished this report in 2014 without him. Thank you Andres.

Finally, I trace the genesis of the key idea that informed our initial funding application for this project to a speculative phone call Senior Researcher Dr Emma Lindley made to Professor Gordon Lynch in the autumn of 2011. Emma's capacity to quickly establish intellectual and emotional rapport was crucial to getting this project off the ground. The personal and professional impact of losing such a singular and close colleague was considerable, and choosing to make death a central feature of spirituality was no doubt informed by Emma's untimely passing.[1] Emma's intellect and humour have been sorely missed, and while I am sure this final report would have been different – and better - with her contribution, I am glad to dedicate it to her memory.

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Second edition (September 2017)

Endnotes

Preface to the second edition

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86 Lynch, G. (2012). The sacred in the modern world: A cultural sociological approach. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

87 Hay, D. (2002). The spirituality of adults in Britain- recent research. Scottish Journal of Healthcare Chaplaincy 5 (1). Retrieved from http://sach.org.uk/journal/0501p04_hay.

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See also Cacioppo, J. (2009, 8 September). Connected minds: Loneliness, social brains and the need for community. [YouTube]. RSA. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iu6RM_Ib30A

90 In our third workshop, there was a wider discussion about the role of beliefs in connection to spirituality, with Gay Watson remarking that Buddhists believe that 'beliefs', as such, tend to screw you up, while Jules countered that Plato had a view of beliefs that was very different- 'theoria'- is more about a personal journey.

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97 Ibid.

98 Lynch, G. (2002). After religion: 'Generation X' and the search for meaning. London: Darton, Longman & Todd Ltd. p.11.

99 Haidt, J. (2012, 17 March). Forget the money, follow the sacredness. New York Times. Retrieved from http://campaignstops.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/17/forget-the-money-follow-the-sacredness/?_r=0)

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and Rowson, J. (2014, 14 August). Moral foundations of UKIP's growth in popularity. [Blog post]. Bella Caledonia. Retrieved from:

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109 Ibid.

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111 Heifetz, R.A. & Linsky, M. (2002). Leadership on the line: Staying alive through the danger of leading. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School

112 Hunter, J., & Chaskalson, M. (2013). Making the mindful leader: Cultivating skills for facing adaptive challenges. The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of the Psychology of Leadership, Change, and Organizational Development, 195.

113 Moore, D. A., & Loewenstein, G. (2004). Self-interest, automaticity, and the psychology of conflict of interest. Social Justice Research, 17 (2), 189-202.

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115 Ibid

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117 Djikic, M. (2014). Art of mindfulness integrating Eastern and Western approaches. In The Wiley Blackwell handbook of mindfulness. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons. pp. 139-148. Retrieved from http://www-2.rotman.utoronto.ca/facbios/file/(2014)%20Djikic.pdf

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120 See http://www.gurdjieff.com/about.php. George Ivanovich Gurdjieff was an influential Greek-Armenian spiritual teacher, who began to share his ‚The Fourth Way' in Moscow in 1912. He argued that it was neither a religion, nor a philosophy, but a practical teaching to be lived and verified by direct experience.

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122 Johnson, M. (2007). The meaning of the body- the aesthetics of human understanding. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. p1.

123 Williams, R. (2014, 8 July). The physicality of prayer. New Statesman, Retrieved from http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2014/07/after-god-how-fill-faith-shaped-hole-modern-life

124 The idea of 'experience' as such is not straightforward, and the subject of a huge literature that is beyond our scope here. However, Robert Rowland Smith's main inquiry in our second workshop was into the nature of experience, and the role of the 'I' in interpreting that experience. He referred to Freud's 'Das Eich' – 'the I' as that which is "unable to destroy itself." A useful clarification is that while ego often confused with "self-identity", for Freud Ego means "I want". In this respect, spirituality can be thought of as the interruption of desire, the interruption of the gratifying urge and "the selflessness that sits alongside the need for a self."

125 Gay Watson presented ideas from her book on Emptiness: what is 'empty of' essence, permanence, singularity, and closely related to interdependence. The sense of 'emptying out' has western connections in Heraclitus, Stoicism; Postmodernism, Science, indeterminacy and metanarratives. What makes this philosophically rich account of emptiness visible is silence: the art of the unseen. This purpose serves to draw our attention to 'The complacency of the seen' Emptiness is about the lenses through which we look, rather than what we look at. What does an appreciation of emptiness point towards? The human challenge to know oneself as "Embodied, embedded, connected".

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128 MacLean, K. A., Johnson, M. W., & Griffiths, R. R. (2011). Mystical experiences occasioned by the hallucinogen psilocybin lead to increases in the personality domain of openness. Journal of Psychopharmacology, 25 (11), 1453-1461.

129 White, F. (1998). The overview effect: Space exploration and human evolution. AIAA.

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131 Claxton, G. (2014, 10 February). Science and spirituality: 'Effing the ineffable.' [Web log]. RSA. https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/rsa-

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133 Wilber, K. (2011). The marriage of sense and soul: Integrating science and religion. New York: Random House.

134 See, for example: Beauregard & Paquette, 2006; 2008; Davis & Vago, 2013; Greyson et al., 2014; Hood, 2005; Josipovic, 2013; MacLean et al., 2011; Newberg, 2014; Tang & Tang, 2013; Urgesi et al., 2010

135 To contain the scope, I say little about 'the extended mind' here, in which the mind and cognitive processes of an individual extend beyond the boundaries of both skull (as is traditionally believed) and body (as proposed by the embodied cognition thesis). As Clark & Chalmers succinctly put it in their seminal paper: "…once the hegemony of skin and skull is usurped, we may be able to see ourselves more truly as creatures of the world". Chalmers, D. & Clark, A. (1998). The Extended Mind. Analysis. 58 (1), 7–19.

136 Examples include power posing (adopting an open and expansive body posture) increasing testosterone, decreasing cortisol, and increasing feelings of power and risk tolerance; touching a hard surface triggers abstract notions of difficulty; holding a warm cup of coffee satisfies the need for social warmth; (see Bargh et al., 2012, for a review).Other perspectives suggest that the process of meaning-making itself is contingent on the memory of the body's physical responses to past sensory input (Taylor & Lamoreaux, 2008).

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147 McGilchrist, I. (2012). The divided brain and the search for meaning: Why we are so unhappy. London: Yale University Press.

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152 Sloterdijk, P. (2013). You must change your life. Cambridge: Polity Press. p.11

153 Doidge, N. (2014). The brain that changes itself: Stories of Personal Triumph from the Frontiers of Brain Science. New York: Penguin.

154 Waitzkin, J. (2008). The art of learning. New York: Free Press.

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156 Sloterdijk, P. (2013). You must change your life. Cambridge: Polity Press. p.4

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158 Our capacity for creativity, for instance, is addressed by a family of contemplative arts including improvisation, journaling, music, and singing. Physical movement via

walking meditation, yoga, dance, Qigong, and others. Our capacity to form relationships with others via deep listening, storytelling, and dialog, while our capacity for stillness is cultivated via meditation, silence, and centering; retreats, ceremonies, and rituals can address our deeper cyclical needs for consistency and repetition; pilgrimages, volunteering, work, and vigils address our needs for activism and effecting change; loving-kindness, lectio divina, beholding, and visualization can refine our long-term generative capacities. Despite their various forms, however, all contemplative practices share two vital elements: awareness and connection/communion. See Centre for Contemplative Mind in Society. (2014). The Tree of Contemplative Practices. Retrieved from http://www.contemplativemind.org/practices/tree

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Part Three

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172 Kahane, A. (2010). Power and love: A theory and practice of social change. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

173 Self, W. (2014, 23 June). Let's talk about death. [YouTube]. RSA. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IE0uT5Kyt4

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176 See, for example: Cozzolino, P. J., Staples, A. D., Meyers, L. S., & Samboceti, J. (2004). Greed, death, and values: From terror management to transcendence management theory. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin. 30 (3), 278-292.

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182 Greenberg, J., Solomon, S., & Pyszczynski, T. (1997). Terror management theory of self-esteem and cultural worldviews: Empirical assessments and conceptual refinements. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology. 29, 61-139. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(08)60016-7

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185 Pyszczynski, T., Solomon, S., & Greenberg, J. (2003). In the wake of 9/11: The psychology of terror. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association

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224-228.

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188 In his comments on this report, Ian Christie made an interesting challenge to this point: "Whose last taboo, though? 'Our' here seems to mean: 'liberal atheist-humanists' last taboo. It is not a taboo in the religious traditions. As with the other categories, we are confronting a situation in which liberal humanism, agnostic at least and atheist at most, is struggling to find answers to ultimate questions that the faith traditions have tackled for millennia, but cannot bring itself to look at the process and findings they have come up with. Perhaps the last taboo for liberal humanism is the acknowledgement that it has a lot to learn from traditions whose premises and goals it wishes to deny?"

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190 In his feedback on the paper, Ian Christie wrote: "But doing it well in the Christian sense is not just about having a good style of send-off and a gift for striking the right note of depth and solemnity….'Doing Death' is not just about process but also about trust, hope and conviction about things which are actually the ultimate facts of the matter in existence.

191 Self, W. (2014, 23 June). Let's talk about death. [YouTube]. RSA. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7lE0uT5Kyt4

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Kurzban, R. (2012). Why everyone (else) is a hypocrite: Evolution and the modular mind. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

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205 Varela, F. (1997). Ethical know how, action. In Varela, F. (ed.) (1997). Sleeping, dreaming and dying:An exploration of consciousness with the Dalai Lama. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications.

206 Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1991). Flow: The psychology of optimal experience (Vol. 41). New York: Harper Perennial.

207 Varela, F. & Shear, J. (eds.) (1999). The view from within: First person approaches to the study of consciousness. Exeter: Imprint Academic. pp. 34-35.

208 In Varela's terms, to say that the self is virtual is to say that biologically the self is: "a coherent global pattern that emerges from the activity of simple local components, which seems to be centrally located, but is nowhere to be found, and yet is essential as a level of interaction for the behaviour of the whole" (Varela 1999: 53). Linguistically: "What we call "I" can be analysed as arising out of our recursive linguistic abilities and their unique capacity for self-description and narration" (Varela 1999: 61). Socially: ""I" can be said to be for the interactions with others, for creating social life. Out of these articulations come the emergent properties of social life for which the selfless "I" is the basic component…"

209 Varela, F. & Shear, J. (eds.) (1999). op. cit. p.62.

210 Loy, D. (2000). Lack and transcendence: The problem of death and life in psychotherapy, existentialism and Buddhism. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books. xvii.

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212 Ibid

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ties-with-a-cause/?_ga=1.260026573.679069808.1418204749

216 For fuller details of these perspectives, see Rowson, J., Mezey, M., Dellot, B. (2012). Beyond the Big Society. [Online report]. RSA. Retrieved from http://www.thersa.org/action-research-centre/learning,-cognition-and-creativity/social-brain/reports/beyond-the-big-society

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226 Unger, R. M. (2007). The self awakened: Pragmatism unbound. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. p. 38.

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Part Five

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About

The RSA

The RSA (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce) believes that everyone should have the freedom and power to turn their ideas into reality – we call this the Power to Create. Through our ideas, research and 28,000-strong Fellowship, we seek to realise a society where creative power is distributed, where concentrations of power are confronted, and where creative values are nurtured.

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About Perspectiva

Perspectiva seeks to build the intellectual and spiritual foundations for a more conscious society - a society awake to its own depth and diversity, united by an acceptance of ecological constraints, systemic understanding and a commitment to human flourishing throughout the lifespan. Our purpose is fundamental cultural change, measured over decades. Our initial focus is a more conscious society because we believe our most urgent challenge – individually and collectively - is to wake up. We need a fuller grasp of how the world shapes us in order to effectively shape the world.

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Jonathan Rowson is an applied philosopher, writer and chess grandmaster. He is co-founder and Director of Perspectiva, a research organisation in London that examines the relationship between complex societal challenges and the inner lives of human beings. Jonathan is a research fellow at the Centre for the Understanding of Sustainable Prosperity at the University of Surrey, and he was recently awarded a year's Fellowship by the Open Society Foundation. He has degrees from Oxford, Harvard and Bristol Universities and was until recently Director of the Social Brain Centre at the RSA where he authored a number of influential research reports on behaviour change, climate change and spirituality. Jonathan lives in London with his wife Siva and sons Kailash and Vishnu.

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Spiritualise is a tenacious inquiry into the philosophical coherence, scientific grounding and cultural relevance of spiritual perspectives, experiences and practices. The first edition was the culmination of a two-year project at the RSA in London involving over three hundred participants including atheists, agnostics, and people of various faiths. This second edition includes an extended new preface and an additional chapter focussed on the relationship between spiritual sensibility and political imagination. The booklet is written by Dr Jonathan Rowson, formerly Director of the Social Brain Centre at the RSA, and now Director of Perspectiva – a new research institute that examines the relationship between complex global challenges and the inner lives of human beings.

Feedback on the first edition:

"One of the most sensible and sincere documents ever written in the field."
– Professor David Tacey, author of The Spirituality Revolution (2004) and Religion as Metaphor(2015)

"…Gave permission to take Spirituality more seriously."
- Professor Linda Woodhead, Director, Institute for Social Futures, University of Lancaster.

"…Invites readers as participants to imagine and create radical futures around a new conception of being and becoming human."
– Professor Indy Johar

"Spiritualise contains a deep challenge for those working in and for governments, to ground our thinking in what really matters to people."
- Ken Thomson, Director-General, Scottish Government

"Jonathan's work on spirituality landed a long overdue and widely called-for intellectual inquiry."
– Indra Adnan, Psychotherapist and co-initiator of The Alternative, UK

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